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AMAZING STORIES

AUGUST 1956 VOL. 30 NO. 8

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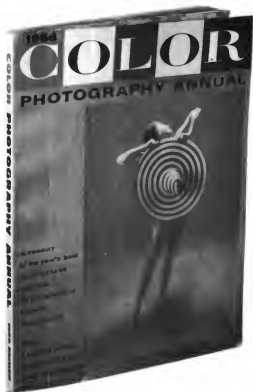
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THE BEAST WITH SEVEN TAILS By Leonard G. Spencer

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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

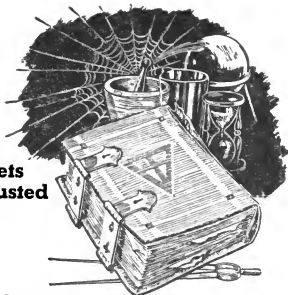
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BY THE EDITOR

DIALOGUE IN THE EDITOR'S OFFICE:

Fan: Where's Browne?

Ed: Gone.

Fan: Gone where?

Ed: Out to the Coast.

Fan: What for?

Ed: TV writing. Long term contract. Warner Bros.

Fan: When'll he be back?

Ed: Won't be. Gone for good.

Fan: Who are you?

Ed: New editor. Name of Fairman.

Fan: I thought you were a writer.

Ed: I was. Now I'm an editor.

Fan: Know much about editing science fiction?

Ed: Some.

Fan: It ain't easy.

Ed: You telling me?

Fan: Especially *Amazing Stories*. You follow good men.

Ed: I know.

Fan: Gernsback—Ray Palmer—Howard Browne.

Ed: Uh-huh.

Fan: Think you can measure up?

Ed: All a guy can do is try.

Fan: Got any ideas about how to handle the book?

Ed: A few.

Fan: Tell me.

Ed: Don't dare. You might be a spy.

Fan: A spy for whom?

Ed: *Imagination*. *Other Worlds*. Who knows?

Fan: I'm no spy!

Ed: Good. You got any ideas?

(Concluded on page 130)

HOW WOULD YOU USE UNLIMITED POWER?

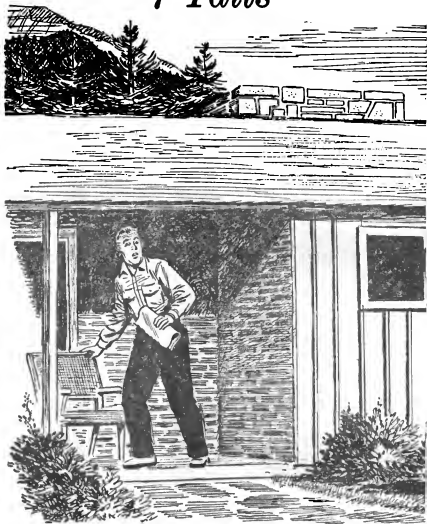
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The Beast With 7 Tails



Janice fled in terror and panic



from the horrible thing on the beach.

THE BEAST WITH 7 TAILS

By LEONARD G. SPENCER

The walking nightmare came apparently from nowhere, to prowl the world. Its burning eyes found Janice. Its hideous bulk barred her path to safety. What could she do? Trapped as she was between the monster and the deep blue sea?

THROUGH the limitless reaches of interstellar space, moving at the velocity of light, sped a sleek, golden-hulled missile. Guided by far-reaching, complex interstellar webs of subradio beams, the space vessel moved unerringly toward its destination. Under ordinary conditions, the slim, golden needle would have made the sixty-thousand light-year trip in a matter of days, held on its course by the great robot-controlled subradio beams that controlled it.

But even the best systems can go astray. The sleek ship's course led it near an unstable star, a sun that was about to vent its energies in that greatest of all stellar explosions, the supernova.

Accidents are caused by coincidences; seagoing vessels

strike icebergs, automobiles run into cows, and aircraft hit high-flying eagles. The result is disastrous.

As the spacecraft neared the unstable sun, the sun began to expand and swell, spewing energy into nearby space at such a fantastic rate that it soon equalled the radiation output of a hundred thousand normal stars, and it had only begun its expansion. The ravening, unholy power of the sun's core blasted off the dense, gaseous layers of the surface as though they had been mere wisps of fog. The temperature of that searing blast made a thermonuclear bomb seem cool and tame in comparison; the blue-white, incandescent surface spread outward into space at tremendous speed, annihilat-

ing every solid object in its path. The star was no longer just a star—it was a supernova.

The golden spaceship itself was much too far away to be physically hurt, even by this titanic explosion; no wisp of the incredibly hot gases ever touched it, nor was it near enough to suffer from the torrents of radiant energy that poured from the exploding core of the supernova. But an atomic explosion of that size has far-reaching effects; the subradio beams that held the ship on its course were completely blanketed by the radiation from the detonating sun. It was as though a railroad train had suddenly run out of tracks. The spacecraft went off course; the subradio guide beams had been ruined because of the static of the exploding star and the ship continued undirected.

Lost now, and not knowing where it was headed, the golden vessel still moved on through space. Eventually, another star loomed up before the ship, and automatic mechanisms within came to life in order to prevent the smashing of the vessel. The ship braked and slowed, automatically searching for a landing spot. It took time, but eventually the automatic searcher beams

found a planet—the third one from the yellow dwarf sun.

The ship headed for it, looking for a place to land.

TO: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III
FROM: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI

SHIP I-69 FROM YOUR
PLANET HAS NOT AR-
RIVED. PLEASE CHECK
SHIPPING ORDERS. IT
IS IMPERATIVE THAT
KRROBEK BE HERE BY
19/37/522. THIS IS UR-
GENT — REPEAT — UR-
GENT.

LLOGEL

Janice Hadley pulled off her bathing cap and shook her head to spread her flowing, dark brown hair to the warm Pacific breeze.

"The only trouble with swimming in the ocean," she said, "is that the salt dries on you and makes your skin itch."

Daniel Thorne rubbed himself briskly with the big red-and-white beach towel. He looked at her, grinning. "Yeah," he agreed, "but it's a nice itch."

"Foo!" the girl said, without expecting an answer. She looked at the cloudless California sky and stretched her arms wide, luxuriating in the

caress of the soft breeze and the warmth of the late afternoon sun.

The little beach was not long; it stretched for only a little over a hundred yards between the high, rocky cliffs that surrounded it on either side. The seclusion was perfect; ever since she had been a child, Janice had always loved the place. It was her private beach, the only one on her father's estate, just outside Arborville. A personal haven.

Dan Thorne was a husky, six-foot-two individual whose Tarzan-like body and handsome face made one think of a movie star—which was not at all surprising, because that is exactly what he was. *The Daniel Thorne*, in the same class with Burt Lancaster and Stewart Granger. He tossed the beach towel to Janice. "Open up the lunch basket, gal; I'm hungry."

"Food coming up," she said, smiling. She knelt on the sand, opened the big wicker basket, and began rummaging inside. She set out sandwiches, a bowl of potato salad, and a jar of small sweet pickles. "Where's the iced tea?" she asked. "You didn't put the thermos jug in here."

Dan frowned a little. "No; I thought you did. It must

still be in the car. Want me to go get it?"

"Please, Dan. My mouth feels like it's lined with salty blotting paper. I couldn't take a single bite without something to drink."

"Right. I'll be back in less than no time." He started off across the sand toward the cliff path, his strong, tanned legs carrying him in easy strides.

The car was parked a good three quarters of a mile away, at the end of the beach road; Dan would need several minutes to get there and come back with the thermos jug. Janice spread the beach towel out on the sand and lay down, facing the sea, watching the splash of the waves on the pebbled shore.

The long swim in the surging surf and the warm sun had made her drowsy; she closed her eyes and luxuriated in the smooth-rough feel of the terrycloth beneath her and the heat of the beach sand that seeped through the big towel. She must have dozed off for a moment, for the next thing she knew, she heard footsteps on the sand.

"Dan? Just pour me some of that tea; I think I'm dying of thirst."

There was no answer.

Janice sat up and opened her eyes.

And screamed in terror.

The thing she saw coming toward her was like nothing she had ever seen before. Not even the special effects men at the studio had ever dreamed up a monster like this. It towered a full fifteen feet above the sand; its four arms and great double shoulders were covered with long, black hair; the pelt that covered its chest and belly was silvery-gray; the long, hairy legs ended in feet armed with razor-like claws.

But the face was the most terrifying of all. It was noseless and split by a wide, many-fanged mouth. Above the mouth were two glaring, orange-red eyes. Silently, it stood there watching her.

For an instant after she screamed, Janice was too terrified to move. Then she leaped to her feet to run. The towering monster took another step toward her.

It was entirely too much for Janice Hadley. She collapsed on the shore in a dead faint.

The thing took another step.

TO: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI
FROM: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III

THE BEAST WITH 7 TAILS

SORRY ABOUT DELAY
OF SHIP I-69. AS FAR AS
WE CAN TELL, A SUPER-
NOVA IN THE THIRD SEC-
TOR FOULED UP THE
GUIDE BEAMS AND
THREW THE SHIP OFF
COURSE. WE ARE MAK-
ING AN EXHAUSTIVE
SEARCH. WILL DO OUR
BEST TO HAVE KRROBEK
ON DANNISET VI BY
19/37/522.

MELWAR

Dan Thorne climbed easily up the rocky cliff to the level ground above the beach. He glanced back to see Janice spread the towel on the sand, and then strode on toward the spot where the car was parked, three-quarters of a mile away. He had not gone more than a few hundred yards when he saw the sun glinting off something metallic in the distance. He stopped and shaded his eyes to see it better.

It was well over a mile away, and a good long distance from the car, but he could swear he hadn't seen it when they'd pulled up to park. Still, perhaps the sun hadn't caught it then. He wondered what in the devil it was. It looked like a golden dome of some kind.

He frowned. Should he?

Should he go take a look at it? Unable to suppress his curiosity, he headed for the golden object at an easy lope.

The closer he got, the more curious the thing began to look. It looked something like an elongated egg sitting on its big end, and seemed to be made of some golden metal. It was nearly thirty feet high, and a large opening in the side showed it to be hollow within—or at least the top half was hollow.

Nothing seemed to be moving anywhere around it, so Dan walked right up to the metallic yellow tower.

"Hey! Anybody home?" he called.

There was no answer.

He walked around it, studying it from all angles. No sign of any occupant could be seen. Reflectively, Dan scratched his head.

The first thought that came to him was that this was some sort of movie prop. A spaceship, maybe, that had been used in that recent potboiler, *Pirates of the Starry Void*.

Then he grinned. What would a prop from a cheap science-fiction B film be doing way out here? And why would they have built it so solidly?

This was no prop. This was—the real thing? A spaceship of some kind? He shook his

head. That was a crazy idea.

It was obviously a grounded Air Force craft. One of the new, experimental secret ships. Dan decided to investigate. He grabbed the oddly cold metal and began to draw himself tortuously up the side of the vessel, heading for the opening in the side ten feet above the ground.

The metal was slippery and purchase was hard to attain, even for a trained athlete like Dan, but finally he pulled himself up over the ledge and peered inside.

He hung on the lip of the opening in the side of the golden egg for a moment, staring.

There was nothing to be seen. Nothing. The golden craft was a hollow shell. Dan scratched his head in puzzlement and drew himself up a little higher, looking down inside.

Nothing.

After a moment more, he swung out and let himself drop lightly to the ground. Whatever this thing was, he had never experienced its like before. It was obviously Top Secret.

Shrugging his shoulders, he turned away. He decided he'd notify the local Air Force squadron. Later — after he and Janice had had their pic-

nic. There was no point in interrupting a pleasant afternoon just to tell the Air Force that some weird craft of theirs had crashed on the beach.

He headed back towards the car, jogging lightly to make up the time he had lost in his pointless detour. After he had gone a hundred yards or so, he had reached a high point on the rocks, from which he could see the end of the rutted road that led to the ranch. The car should have been parked at the end of the road. But it wasn't—the chevvv was gone!

TO: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III
FROM: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI

THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS WATCH OUT FOR SUPERNOVAS WHEN MAKING UP SHIPPING ROUTES. BE ASSURED THAT THERE WILL BE SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS AS A RESULT OF THIS OVERSIGHT. SHIP I-69 HAS NOT PUT IN AN APPEARANCE YET, AND I CAN TELL YOU QUITE INFORMALLY THAT HEADS WILL ROLL IF KRROBEK IS NOT HERE IMMEDIATELY IF NOT SOONER. GET YOUR

GUIDE BEAMS WORKING AGAIN, OR ELSE.

LLOGEL

The first sensation Janice Hadley was aware of was one of motion—gentle, rocking motion, as if she were being carried tenderly high above the ground. Then she sensed the feel of something rough and scaly grasping her loosely around the waist.

A moment later, all the sense-perceptions blended into a whole as she came to full awareness of where she was and what was happening. She remembered—

There was the monster, towering fifteen feet in the air, its four fearsome arms dangling loosely, its hairy legs shambling uncertainly toward her. Then there was the hand, coming down at her—and then, blankness.

Now she was conscious again. She fought to retain her sanity as she realized where she was.

The monster had picked her up, swung her up with two of its four arms, and had carried her a few feet out into the water. It was standing there, now, with the blue-green waves swirling up around its thick pillars of legs, staring down at her in curiosity. It held her pinioned

around the waist, and the touch of its hand was like sandpaper. The noseless face peered down curiously at her, and the exhalation from the creature's fanged mouth swept down stifflingly.

Janice froze for a moment, quivering, too frightened to move. Then she began to kick and scream, lashing out with her bare feet against the silvery-gray pelt of the monster's chest. It was like kicking against an uncomplaining wall. Her voice rose and fell in a chilling cry.

The monster drew her closer. Then she saw it bring up one of its remaining two arms, and poise it over her. Slowly, with great deliberation, the beast lowered the arm. Janice stared in terror at the long, gleaming black claw that tipped the hand—tapering to a fine razor-keen edge.

She gasped and shrank away as the tip of the claw approached her throat.

She writhed in the monster's grip. "Dan! Dan!" she managed to gasp, but the only sound that responded was the slow, quiet lapping of the water against the beach. "*Dan! Where are you?*"

There was no sign of him.

The claw touched her throat now. She felt a hot stab

of pain as it pierced her flesh—and then, instantly, the claw drew back and hovered an inch or two away from the terrified girl's throat.

Again the claw lowered, more carefully, and just grazed her skin. Then, slowly, deliberately, and with extreme precision, the monster began to trace a line down the girl's body with the claw.

It moved down her throat into the valley between her heaving breasts. The claw snagged in the blue plastex of her bathing suit, and the keen edge cut through the material without the slightest difficulty. The sudden rush of cool early-evening breezes around her body told her that her breasts were bare—and then, with a quick, decisive gesture, the claw flicked down the length of her body, parting the bathing suit.

It fell away from her flesh. The glaring eyes took in the girl's revealed loveliness for a long, slow, unending moment, as she began once again to sob and moan hysterically.

Then there was the sensation of moving downward, and the revolting odor of the creature's breath was replaced by the cleaner smell of the salt water. Janice felt the water wash over her, and realized, through her blinding

curtain of terror, that the monster had unaccountably set her down in the shallow water.

She looked up desperately at the ponderous bulk standing impassively above her. Then, sobbing wildly, the girl began a mad flight through the knee-high water.

The beast made no attempt to follow her. She reached the beach in a state of near-exhaustion, and grabbed blindly for the terrycloth to cover her nakedness. She wrapped it tightly around her, and turned. The beast was still standing in the water, watching her, motionless.

Shaking with terror, she stumbled up across the beach to the parked car. She threw herself in, lunged hastily for the ignition keys, and somehow managed to drive off in blind terror.

TO: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI
FROM: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III

BEAMS SEARCHING
FOR I-69; NO NEED TO
GET IMPATIENT. ASSURE
YOU THAT K R R O B E K
WILL ARRIVE AT DANNI-
SET VI AS SCHEDULED.
PLEASE BE PATIENT UN-
TIL WE FIND SHIP.

MELWAR

Dan Thorne arrived at the spot where the car had stood less than half an hour before. He was still panting from his long run, and the perspiration glistened on his bronzed skin. He looked around at the sand. Towards the east, the dirt road stretched itself in the general direction of the Hadley home; to the west, there was no road, only sand and rocks. Thorne frowned and looked at the sand at his feet.

The tracks of the tires plainly told what had happened. One set of tracks had had their outlines softened by the wind; they weren't clear and sharp anymore. That was the set of marks the car had made some hours before when Dan and Janice had driven to the secluded beach.

The second set of tracks were quite sharp and clearly defined. The car had been backed up, turned around and headed east, toward the ranchhouse. The tracks were scuffed and smeared badly in places, showing that whoever had been driving it had used a heavy foot on the accelerator, making the wheels spin, and throwing quite a little sand before it gained a purchase on the harder clay beneath.

Thorne's eyes narrowed in anger. Someone had stolen the

car. It was the only explanation; Janice wouldn't have taken the car and left him stranded five miles from the house.

Might as well tell Janice, they'd have to start pretty quickly if they wanted to get back before dark, since the blood-red sun was already nearing the straight, even horizon of the Pacific.

Who in the hell would want to come out here to steal a car? The Chevy station wagon would hardly be worth such effort; a car is easier to steal in a big city. Dan Thorne shrugged his shoulders and started walking toward the rocky cliff that dropped downward toward the tidal beach where Janice was waiting. He grinned wryly to himself. Janice had said she was thirsty, and he was beginning to feel a dryness in his own mouth. By the time the two of them had walked the five miles to the house, they'd both feel as though their mouths were full of cotton.

When he reached the edge of the cliff, he looked down at the beach beneath. There was no one there. Could Janice be out in the surf again? No; no sign of her. Hiding, maybe, to play a trick on him, just for a joke? There

weren't many rocks to hide behind, but—

And then he saw something which sent him scrambling down the rocky path from the cliff as fast as he could negotiate the tortuous, zig-zag walk. There was a patch of blue on the yellow-brown sand—a patch which could only be Janice's bathing suit!

When he finally reached the bottom of the cliff, he sprinted across the beach toward the patch of blue, his heels kicking spurts of sand as he ran.

The bathing suit was lying at the edge of the water; the incoming tide had not yet reached it. He picked it up and the muscles at the hinge of his jaw knotted as he saw that the blue garment had been ripped neatly down the front. He turned then and surveyed the sand around him. There were, of course, his own fresh prints running from the cliff, but he ignored them. The first thing that caught his eyes were the huge prints that led from the cliff to the sea. They were like no footprints he had ever seen before; they were at least two feet long and six inches wide! They looked somewhat like a human being's bare feet had made them, but they were not

quite the right shape, and they were much too large.

Then he saw Janice's footprints, also heading toward the cliff. He had been so perturbed by the discarded bathing suit that he had failed to notice her footprints. Still clutching the torn suit in his hand, he ran back toward the cliff, following Janice's prints.

What had happened? Several times, he called out for her, but his only answer was the distorted echo of his own voice from the jagged cliffs.

He climbed again to the top of the stony bluff, and this time, since he was looking for them, he could see faint traces of Janice's bare feet having run along the rocks, heading toward the car. Then it *had* been Janice who had taken the car! Something had happened while he had been off looking at the golden missile, and Janice had fled from whatever it was, so much afraid that she had driven away without stopping to look for Dan Thorne.

But what had it been that she had seen? What had happened?

Only the strange footprints and the torn bathing suit offered any clue, and they didn't make much sense to Thorne.

There was only one thing

to do; follow the road back to the ranchhouse. If Janice was there, she could explain the whole thing.

Thomas Hadley took his briar pipe from his mouth and looked up as he heard the roaring motor of the Chevy station wagon. He was seated comfortably in the big living room of his home, his body relaxed in the heavy, leather-covered chair that sat in front of the now-dead fireplace, his feet resting comfortably on the shaggy bearskin rug in front of the chair. Across the room, the speaker of his hi-fi set blasted out the shattering chords of Act III, Scene I of Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

*"Hojotoho! Hojotoho!
Heiaha! Heiaha!
Helmwige, hier!
Hieher mit dem Ross!"*

But in spite of the roaring music, the station-wagon's motor could still be heard; it was a raw note imposing itself on the Wagnerian opera. Hadley heard the slam and screech of the brakes. He stood up just as his daughter burst through the door.

"Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! Omigod! Daddy!"

Unheeded, the red beach towel dropped from her as

she rushed into her father's arms.

"Janice! Janice, what's happened?" He held her tight as she sobbed hysterically.

"Monster!" she cried. "Big . . . ugly . . . nasty *thing!*" She sobbed incomprehensibly for a moment, then: "Awful! He . . . *it* . . . tore off my clothes . . . grabbed me . . . hairy . . . *ooohhh!*" And with that, she collapsed, unconscious, in her father's arms.

Holding her tenderly, Thomas Hadley carried his daughter into her room and laid her on the bed. Then he covered her carefully with a blanket and walked to the phone in the living room, his face dark and livid with anger. He placed a call and waited impatiently while the operator connected him with the person he had called.

"Dr. Candor's residence," said a voice at the other end.

"Mrs. Candor, this is Tom Hadley. Let me talk to Bob."

"Just a second, Mr. Hadley."

There was a pause at the other end of the line, then: "Tom? This is Bob. What's the matter?"

Tom Hadley paused for a moment. Could he expose his daughter to this? But there was nothing left to do. He took a deep breath and said:

"Bob, Janice has been criminally attacked—at least, I think she has. She's hysterical. Can you come out right away?"

There was a short silence at the other end of the line before the doctor answered. "That's terrible, Tom. Of course I'll do everything I can. I'll be right out. But are you sure you need a psychiatrist? I mean, is she badly hurt?"

"I don't think so. But, mentally, she's in bad shape."

"Who did it? Have you called the police?" the doctor asked.

"Not yet," said Hadley. "I don't know who did it, but I intend to find out. Get out here as soon as you can while I phone Sheriff Malcom."

"Ten minutes, Tom."

"Right," said Hadley. He hung up and called another number.

"Sheriff Malcom here," said the faintly British voice.

"This is Thomas Hadley, out on Oceanview Road. Get out here as quickly as you can. My daughter's been attacked." He paused significantly. "I'll leave it to you, Sheriff, to see that the papers don't hear of this."

"They'll get nothing from me, Mr. Hadley," said Mal-

com. "I'll be out there as soon as possible."

"Good." Hadley cradled the phone and lit his pipe carefully, trying to keep his hand from trembling as he held the match to the bowl. His voice was hoarse as he said softly to himself: "If it was Dan Thorne . . ." He stopped himself, but the thoughts he had were murderous.

Dan Thorne sat on the top of a rocky outcropping and rubbed his bare feet. They were beginning to hurt. He'd walked all over the beach that afternoon, and then had run all over the landscape, looking at a queer golden missile and searching for a car. Since then, he had walked over four miles—rapidly at first, then more slowly as the soles of his feet had begun to hurt more and more. He looked at the tender skin. There were rock cuts in several places, and the rough coral sand had abraded the instep and his toes raw. He was almost exhausted from the exertion he had gone through.

It had been nearly an hour and a half since he had started from the beach. He knew he was within a mile of the ranchhouse, but since the sun had set, the gray dusk didn't afford much visibility. All he

could see was the pale yellow glow of the house lights in the distance.

Why hadn't Janice sent a car after him? What had happened?

He was still eyeing the far-off gleam of the house lights when another glimmer sprang into sight. Someone had turned on car lights. He couldn't hear the car start, but he saw the headlights start to move. They were coming down the road toward him. Wearily, he stood up. The rough sand grated into his soles, but he started plodding on down the road toward the distant headlights.

It took the car nearly five minutes to cover the mile stretch of rocky, sandy road. As it pulled up close, Dan saw with surprise that it wasn't the station wagon. The insignia on the side of the sedan showed the five-pointed star of the local sheriff's office.

Standing in the glare of the headlights, Dan Thorne waved his hands. The car slowed, and a spotlight suddenly blazed out into the night, catching Dan square in the face.

He squinted against the glare and called out: "For Heaven's sake, shut that thing off; I'm Daniel Thorne."

"Yeah," said a voice from

behind the light. "We've been looking for you, Mr. Thorne. Do oblige us by getting in."

Thorne recognized the man's voice. It was the smooth, silky, British voice of Sheriff James Malcom.

Dan met his eyes as well as he could. "You want me?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes, please," Malcom said. "Please don't hold us up any further."

Puzzled, Thorne climbed into the sedan and took a seat by the sheriff's side. Without a word, the sheriff released the clutch and started the car. Thorne watched him for a long moment; the sheriff, a small, impeccably-groomed man, had his eyes fixed firmly on the road ahead.

"Say, Sheriff," Thorne burst out after a while. "What's going on?"

"We're heading for the Hadley ranch," Malcom told him in clipped, precise syllables. "I'd like to question you there, if it's not much bother."

"Hadley ranch? Questioning? Say, I'm glad you're taking me there. I was swimming with Jan Hadley this afternoon, and she took off and ditched me here. I still can't figure out—" suddenly Thorne's voice fell. "Hey, what kind of questioning are

you talking about, Sheriff? What's been going on today?"

Malcom ignored the question. "You say you were swimming with Miss Hadley this afternoon?" he asked slowly.

"For a while," Thorne said. "Until she vanished. It was a pretty lousy trick to play, believe me." *I hope that's all it was*, he thought. *Just a trick.*

Thorne did not intend to tell the sheriff about the torn bathing suit just yet — or about the monstrous footprints on the sand. The first might indicate some sort of assault, but he couldn't account for the footprints at all, and he didn't care to have Malcom think he was insane. A stunt? A crazy Hollywood gag? *I hope so*, Thorne thought grimly.

"She vanished, eh?" Sheriff Malcom said, as he wheeled the car down the short graded road that led up to the Hadley ranchhouse. "Damned interesting, must say. Just went— into a blue sky, what?"

Thorne turned in his seat to face Malcom. "Suppose you stop playing games, and tell me where Janice is now."

"Very well," Malcom said, as he parked the car. "Come inside, and perhaps we'll all learn a few things. Janice Hadley came back earlier this

afternoon—minus her bathing suit, and in a severe state of shock!"

There was a grim-faced group of men sitting in the handsome living room of Thomas Hadley. As Thorne followed Sheriff Malcom inside, he saw three familiar faces seated in the heavily-upholstered chairs—Thomas Hadley, Jan's father; Robert Candor, a psychiatrist fairly well known in the movie colony; and Sergeant Wheeler, one of Malcom's deputies.

Their faces stiffened as Thorne entered. Dan saw them glaring coldly at him.

"Here he is," Sheriff Malcom said casually.

"Sit down, Thorne," Thomas Hadley said. His voice was tight and harsh with tension.

Thorne crossed the room to the chair Hadley indicated and folded himself down into its embracing plushness, feeling very much bewildered. He looked up expectantly at Hadley.

"Would you mind telling me," he asked slowly, "exactly why I've been summoned here? And where Janice is?"

"Janice is in her room," Hadley said icily. "Perhaps you know how she happened to lose her bathing suit—and

why she stumbled in here screaming hysterically that she'd been attacked!"

Thorne burst from the chair instantly. "If you think that I—"

"I made no allegations, Thorne. You were the last person known to be with her this afternoon before the attack." Hadley turned worriedly to the psychiatrist. "Bob, what are your findings?"

Candor, a rangy, intense-looking man in his early forties, rubbed his chin reflectively. "Well, Tom, I've made a complete physical examination, and I tried to talk to the girl as much as her condition would allow."

"And?"

"She hasn't been harmed physically," Candor said.

"You're sure?" Hadley asked.

"I am," said the psychiatrist. Hadley let out a sigh of relief. "Thank God for that," he said.

"However," Candor said, "she *has* had a hell of a scare. I don't know what happened to her out there. All I could get out of her was what you told me—her swimsuit was torn off, and something too terrible to describe happened. She's developed a sort of temporary protective amnesia to

block off the memory. It must have been nasty, whatever it was. She ought to be able to talk about it in a couple of days." He glanced meaningfully at Thorne.

"Umm," Sheriff Malcom said. "Too terrible to describe, eh?" He squinted at Sergeant Foster. "What's your opinion, Sergeant?"

The deputy leaned forward heavily. "Looks pretty open and shut to me," he growled. "This actor-boy was alone with the girl, wasn't he? And it's not hard to guess what he must have tried to do to her."

"You're crazy!" Thorne snapped bitterly. "I won't be framed into anything!" He turned in appeal to Thomas Hadley. "You've known me a long time, Mr. Hadley. You know I wouldn't do a thing like that to Janice! How can you let this uniformed ox stand here and accuse me of—of—"

"That's a point," Hadley said, his cold anger melting a little. "It's not the sort of thing I'd expect from you, Dan."

"But she was assaulted by someone," the psychiatrist interjected. "She keeps talking of a hairy monster—a beast with seven tails, or something. It's easy to see the

girl's half out of her mind with fear."

"Beast with seven tails?" Thorne asked.

"It was just some wild thing she started to tell me," Dr. Candor said. "Then she burst into tears again. The way I see it, it's a sublimated and imaginatively transferred representation of the libidinous forces unleashed by her attacker during the—"

"Very well," Sheriff Malcom cut in. "I'm willing to accept your hypothesis—whatever it means," he added more softly. "But we're all talking too much, and the one man who should be talking isn't. Mr. Thorne, suppose you tell us in your own words exactly what *did* take place on the beach this afternoon?"

Dan described the outing exactly as it happened, right up to the time when he left Janice on her terrycloth and headed back for the thermos jug. Then he stopped.

"Why don't you go on?" the sheriff said gently.

"Because if I go on, Dr. Candor over here is going to make me the next candidate for his loonybin. So I won't go on. I'm stuck either way, anyhow. If I tell you what happened, you'll think I'm crazy and put me away—and

if I don't, I'm prime suspect in the assault case."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Thomas Hadley said.

"Look," Thorne said patiently. "I'll give you the whole thing, if you want it. But don't interrupt."

"Very well," Hadley said.

"Okay. After I left Jan, I started back to the car. But I got sidetracked by a golden spaceship, standing on the sand a mile away. I went over to investigate, and—"

"A golden *what*?" Malcom asked, politely incredulous.

"Some kind of space craft," said Thorne, determined now to be perfectly honest and devil take the consequences. "It was just a shell—some sort of drive mechanism down below, and then an empty inside. It was about thirty feet high, standing up there on its big end."

"Tell me something," Sergeant Wheeler demanded. "What was your last movie, Thorne?"

"*The Surgeon's Knife*," Thorne said, referring to a medical-documentary he'd made for an independent studio not long before.

"Uh-huh," said Wheeler sarcastically. "Sure it wasn't some space-opera thing, now?"

"Listen," Thorne said. "I'm

giving you the account as I saw it. If you're going to interrupt me, I'll stop right here."

Wheeler sat back angrily. "Wiseguy," he snorted.

"All right, Mr. Thorne," the sheriff said. "After the golden spaceship, what?"

"I got through investigating that, and then I went back to the car. It wasn't there. I was stranded. And I could tell from the kind of tracks that the car'd been taken out in a hurry."

"Oh, a detective, eh?" Wheeler said.

"Let him speak," said Sheriff Malcom.

"Then I went to the edge of the cliff and looked down—and I saw Jan was gone. I ran down to the beach, and found her bathing suit slit down the front."

He paused, unwilling to mention the gigantic footprints. He was completely befogged by the tangled case, and seriously alarmed now at what really did happen to Janice.

Dr. Candor cleared his throat. "The suit was slit down the front, you say?"

Thorne nodded.

"Odd. Because the only sign of any physical harm done to Miss Hadley was a tiny scratch at the base of her

throat—made as if by a terribly sharp knife. As if, perhaps, someone had placed the knife at her throat and ripped straight downward."

"You haven't checked the beach, have you?" Sheriff Malcom said to Wheeler.

"Not yet, chief."

"You ought to recover the bathing suit."

"And how about that spaceship?" Wheeler asked hilariously. "Exhibit B. Don't you want me to bring that in?"

"A good idea," commented Hadley. "It may be valuable evidence."

"You should notify the Air Force, at least," said Thorne. "It's probably an experimental model that's crashed."

He paused, realizing the four of them were snickering, and Wheeler was close to open laughter.

"You don't believe anything of what I've said, do you?" Thorne demanded hotly.

Sheriff Malcom grinned. "That was never implied, was it?"

"I'll say it was," said Thorne. "You think I'm crazy. Especially *you*," he said, gesturing at the psychiatrist.

There was a long silence. Then, finally, the sheriff said, "There is some doubt as to

the veracity of what you've been telling us, y'know."

"Which means, roughly translated, that you think I raped Jan—Miss Hadley—and cooked up the wildest story imaginable, on the general grounds that the craziest alibi I had stood me the best chance of getting off, is that it?" Thorne crossed the room and faced them. "Well, here's another clue for you, then," he snapped. "There were some footprints down on the beach, near where Jan had been."

"Footprints?" Malcom echoed.

"Yes, footprints. *Footprints two feet long!* Go do some Sherlock Holmesing about them!"

Dr. Candor cleared his throat. "I think we've accomplished about all we can accomplish in this inquiry," he said. "Mr. Thorne is obviously—"

"—crazy," Thorne concluded.

"I wish you weren't so blunt," Candor said. "But certainly you can't seriously expect us to swallow a story about a golden spaceship and footprints two feet long, do you?"

"I'm not asking you to," Thorne said. "Why in blazes don't you go down to the beach and see for yourself?"

The tide may have obliterated the prints, for all I know, but that golden shell's still going to be there!"

"And the bathing suit," the sheriff said. "That's important evidence. Wheeler, take my car and go down to the beach. See what you can find. Look around for golden spaceships, particularly. It's a lead we can't ignore."

The deputy sheriff grinned. "I'd prefer that you come with me, sir. Even if I found the thing, you might think I was cracked too!"

"Very well," Malcom said. "We'll both go."

"I'll tend to Miss Hadley again," Dr. Candor said. "Perhaps I can apply some therapy that'll bring her out of the state of shock she's in."

"What about me?" Thorne asked. "Are you going to leave a vicious, sadistic monster like me loose in this house unguarded?"

"Hardly," said Malcom. "Wheeler, you stay here and keep an eye on Thorne. I'll go down to the beach myself—and, damme, you'd *better* take my word if there's anything peculiar down there."

Thorne sat down and crossed his long legs. "Don't rush, Sheriff. That spaceship's not going anywhere. But I sug-

gest you keep your gun cocked."

TO: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI
FROM: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III

SEARCH BEAMS HAVE LOCATED SHIP I-69. AUTOSIGNALS WILL DIRECT TAKEOFF AND GUIDE TO DANNISET VI. KRROBEK SHOULD ARRIVE AS SCHEDULED, PLUS TIME ALLOWED FOR DELAY ENROUTE. I TOLD YOU NOT TO GET IN SUCH A FUSS. I.O.C.C. ALWAYS DELIVERS, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. THANKS FOR YOUR PATIENCE.

MELWAR

Dan Thorne sat in a cell of the county jail, staring angrily at the thick steel bars. Sergeant Foster stood outside the bars, an insolent smile on his face.

"Why don't you come clean, Thorne? What did you do to the girl? What happened yesterday evening?"

Thorne took a deep breath and stood up. He walked over to the cell door and looked straight at the deputy. His eyes were dangerous. "What the hell have you got against me, Foster? Nothing's happened to Miss Hadley. You've

pulled me in here for questioning, and all you've done is harp on that one thing—something you've got no basis for. I don't have to put up with that, Wheeler, and I warn you that if I have to listen to one more silly yap out of your stupid, vicious face, I'm going to put a fist right where it will do the most damage. Now, shut up." He turned and walked back to his bunk.

The deputy looked both frightened and angry. At last the anger got the upper hand, and he said: "You think you're pretty wise, don't you, Thorne? Think that just because you're a tinhorn actor you can lord it all over the rest of us poor guys. Well, you can get that out of your head. I don't like your attitude, and—"

"—and I don't like your attitude, either, Officer!" snapped a voice from down the hall. "I'll thank you to leave my client alone!"

Wheeler swiveled his head and Dan Thorne stood up. Jerry Kleinschmidt, probably the finest criminal lawyer in California, came bustling down the corridor toward the cell. Behind him was Sheriff Malcom.

Jerome Kleinschmidt was short and balding, a dumpy

little man in rumpled clothes who nevertheless carried himself with an air of absolute authority and self-possession. "I have obtained a writ of *habeus corpus* from Judge O'Shaughnessy," he said. "Release Mr. Thorne."

Wheeler opened his mouth, closed it, glowered at Kleinschmidt, and then produced the keys to the cell. He unlocked the door with obvious unwillingness and allowed Thorne to walk out of the cell.

"Am I glad to see you," Thorne said. "You're a sight for sore eyes, Jerry."

"Never mind that now, Dan," the little lawyer said. "Let's get out of this upholstered sewer and get to someplace where we can talk."

They walked out of the cell block and into the outer office. The sheriff was nowhere to be seen, but a small, very plain, dishwater blonde woman was sitting on the bench near the door. As soon as her eyes lit on Thorne, she stood up and smiled bashfully. "Are you Mr. Thorne? Why, certainly you are! Oh, Mr. Thorne, I've admired your pictures so much; I've never missed a one of them."

"Thank you," Thorne said, somewhat taken aback. "I—"

"Oh, may I please have your autograph, Mr. Thorne?"

Without waiting for an answer, she pulled an autograph book and a fountain pen out of her handbag and pressed them both into Thorne's hands. "Please, Mr. Thorne, I would just love to have—"

"*Patty!*" It was Sergeant Wheeler's voice from behind Thorne; he sounded like a badly wounded bull. The blondish woman stepped back, frightened.

Sensing what was going on, Thorne calmly opened the autograph book and wrote: "Best wishes, Daniel Thorne," signing it with more than his usual flourish. He handed the book to the woman, turned and grinned wolfishly at the deputy, and then strode out of the door, Jerry Kleinschmidt at his heels.

"Do you know what you're doing?" the lawyer asked when they had left the building.

"Sure. That was Wheeler's wife. I think I see why he doesn't like me—his wife is a fan of mine; too strong a fan."

"That's not what I mean," Kleinschmidt said. "I want to know what you're going to do about this jam. What happened, and how? And be sure you tell me the truth."

"You know me better than that, Jerry. Let's go get a

beer, and I'll tell you what happened."

They walked across the quiet street of the sleepy little Southern California town and went into an air-conditioned bar that labelled itself "The Santa Barbara."

They ordered a couple of bottles of cold beer and sipped at them while Dan told his story. When he had finished, Kleinschmidt looked up at him. "And what did the sheriff say when he came back?"

Dan shrugged. "He said there was no ship there. That's all. But I know I saw it, Jerry; I *know* I did."

Jerry nodded. "Sure, sure. Sure you did. I believe you. But that's going to make a hell of a story for a jury."

Thorne lifted his eyebrows. "Jury? Why a jury? What can the police get me on?"

The lawyer rubbed his nose with a fingertip. "Nothing, that's the trouble. Do you realize that your reputation is at stake, boy? Here's a girl who's been literally frightened out of her wits by something. She describes it as a hairy, fifteen-foot monster with seven tails. Obviously, she doesn't know what she's talking about.

"Meanwhile, you were the last one to see her, and your

story's just as confused as hers, if not quite as daffy. If the public ever gets hold of this, the scandal rags will have a field day. I can see the headlines now:

"Starlet Has Nervous Breakdown After Swim With Film Star!"

"Mysterious Attack on Starlet Has Police Baffled; Thorne Implicated!"

Jerry Kleinschmidt shook his head. "We'll have to watch ourselves, and, not only for your own sake, but for hers."

Dan nodded. "I understand all that, but meanwhile, we've got to do something about Janice. I know that she'd clear me if she were okay, and I'd like to know just what it was that put such an unholy fright into her."

The lawyer bobbed his bald head in agreement. "Sure, Dan, sure. But you keep your nose out of it; let the police find out what's going on."

"I'm just going to go out to Janice's place to see her," Dan said. "Maybe between the two of us, we can find out what in the devil's going on."

Jerry looked a little startled. "Didn't you hear? I thought you knew. Janice isn't at home. Dr. Candor gave her a sedative to calm her and then took her out to that private sanitarium, Seaview."

"Seaview? They've put Janice in the daffy bin?" Dan's eyes grew angry.

"Calm down, boy," said Jerry. "She'll just be there for a few days for a rest. This thing has got her all upset, and she'll be all right there. You just cool down and let things work themselves out. Meanwhile, I'll take care of the legal end of things. Okay?"

"Okay," Dan agreed. But his heart wasn't in it.

The little lawyer stood up and put his hands on Dan's shoulders. "I'm going to take a trip back to L.A. to get things straightened out. I wouldn't advise you to leave just yet; it might look fishy if they thought you were taking a runout powder."

"Right. I'll hold the fort here." Dan watched Kleinschmidt leave, and then he walked over to the pay phone and got Dr. Candor on the line. The psychiatrist's voice was anything but friendly.

"No, Mr. Thorne, I'm afraid I cannot give you permission to see Miss Hadley. It's quite out of the question. She's suffered a very severe shock, and any visitors might further increase the traumatic—"

Thorne hung up and cut the doctor off in mid-sentence.

Then he made another call, this time to Tom Hadley. Hadley wasn't unfriendly, he simply sounded baffled. "No, Dan, if Bob Candor said you shouldn't see her, I won't go against his orders."

"Tom, you don't think I had anything to do with whatever happened to Janice, do you?"

"I don't know; I honestly don't. I would never have thought it, but with such crazy stories, I don't know what to think now. And, after all, Janice is my daughter. As soon as she's rational, she'll be able to tell us what really happened."

"Okay, Tom. I don't blame you, I guess." He said a few more words, but he wasn't paying much attention to what he said. He hung up and walked back to the bar. If only he could get in to see Janice. If only he—

Suddenly, he grinned. What good was it to be an actor if you couldn't put it to practical uses? Still smiling happily to himself, he finished his beer and went up to his hotel room.

Twenty minutes later, a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman stepped out of the hotel. He looked a little like Daniel Thorne, the movie actor, but the resemblance was only superficial. This man was obviously around fifty.

His hair was silvery, his face lined, and his eyes peered myopically from behind heavy glasses. He was dressed in a conservative gray flannel suit, and weighed a good fifty pounds more than he should have, as was evidenced by his protruding paunch.

He was carrying a brief case in his hand, and he looked very important and self-possessed as he hailed a taxi.

"Seaview Rest Home," he said to the driver.

The nurse on duty at the desk looked up at the distinguished man who stood before her. "Yes, sir?" she asked deferentially.

"I'm Dr. Enroth," he said. "Is Dr. Candor in? He said he would be here."

"Dr. Candor? No, sir, he's out on call right now."

Thorne nodded. He'd checked on that very carefully before coming out to Seaview. "That's all right," he said. "I'm actually a bit early. I'll wait for him." He walked over and sat down in a chair near the desk, from which he could watch the girl. If it didn't take too much time, he would use Plan One. If not, he'd use Plan Two. Plan One would get him up to Janice without credentials. Plan Two might get him tied up in red

tape if things didn't work out right.

A woman came into the reception room. "I'd like to see my husband, Mr. Fritchie," she said. "The doctor said I could see him this afternoon."

The nurse smiled. "Yes, Mrs. Fritchie, you're on the call list. Just a moment, I'll phone the ward." She plugged in on the switchboard and said: "Mrs. Fritchie is coming up to see her husband. All right." She looked up at the woman. "You can go right on up; the attendant will let you in."

The woman thanked her and vanished.

Thorne smiled to himself. He had it now. He got up and walked over to the desk. "By the way, how is the Hadley girl this afternoon?"

The nurse smiled up at him. "She's fairly calm, doctor, but the subjective hallucinations are still persisting. Are you in consultation with Dr. Candor?"

Thorne nodded. "Yes. Actually, the girl's father called me; I'm an old friend. I hope Janice got a good room."

"We did our best," the nurse said. "Of course, we're somewhat crowded, but Ward 8 is quite comfortable."

"Of course," Thorne

agreed. Then he rubbed his head with his fingertips. "Ah—nurse, I wonder if you could get me a couple of aspirin tablets? I'm just not used to this sun, I guess; I have a terrible headache."

"Why, certainly, doctor. Just a moment." She rose and walked out of the room.

Quickly, Thorne reached over and plugged in the phone to Ward 8. "This is Dr. Candor," he said, in a perfect imitation of the psychiatrist's voice. "I'm sending Dr. Enroth up to see Miss Hadley."

"Very well, sir," said the voice at the other end.

Thorne hung up and jerked the plug out. He wasn't a moment too soon. The nurse re-entered the room, carrying a glass of water and two aspirins.

"Here you are, doctor. I hope they help."

He thanked her, took the pills, swallowed them with a mouthful of water, and returned the glass. "Do you mind if I stroll around the grounds while I wait for the doctor?" he asked. "There's a cool seabreeze blowing, and I think a little fresh air would help. I'll have to stay in the shade pretty much, though." He smiled a little.

"Perfectly all right, doctor. Go right ahead."

He strolled out the door and headed across the grounds to Ward 8. At the door, he identified himself as Dr. Enroth. The attendant nodded and unlocked the door. "Dr. Candor said you wanted to see the Hadley girl."

"That's right."

"This way, doctor." He started along the corridor, and Thorne followed him. Several doors had to be unlocked and relocked before they finally came to the door of Janice's room. The attendant unlocked that door. "A visitor for you, Miss Hadley." Then he looked at Thorne. "I'll wait outside, doctor; you can signal me through the panel." He pointed to a heavy glass panel in the door. Then he left, locking the door behind him.

Janice was sitting on the edge of the bed. She didn't look sick; she looked mad as hell.

"I suppose you're here to tell me I'm crazy, too," she snapped.

Thorne grinned. "Hell, no, honey; I'm here to find out what the devil's going on."

She looked startled for an instant, then a smile broke over her face. "Dan! I didn't recognize you!" She jumped up and ran into his arms. He

kissed her quickly, then disengaged her arms.

"Better not," he said. "That attendant might take it into his head to peek in through that glass window in the door."

She sat down on the bed and looked up at him. "How in the world did you get in here?"

"Never mind that now," Thorne said. "What I want to know is: What happened yesterday afternoon? Everybody seems to think *I* was the one who hurt you."

"That's silly! But I know how you feel. Dr. Candor thinks I'm a looney; we're in the same boat."

"But what happened, honey?"

Janice told him exactly what had happened. She had evidently repeated it so many times that it no longer terrified her to think of it. When she finished, she looked into his eyes. "Do you think I'm crazy, too?"

He shook his head. "No. I saw the thing's footprints, and I saw the ship."

"What ship?"

He explained to her about the big, golden missile he had seen. "And that means one of two things," he said. "Either this is an elaborate practical joke of some kind or that

monster is actually from some other world." He frowned. "The trouble is, I didn't think such things happened outside of a movie studio."

"It's no hoax," Janice said, shivering a little, "that thing was as real and as alive as you are. There wasn't anything phony about it."

"I believe you," Thorne said. "And that means we'll have to prove to the authorities that the thing really exists. The only trouble is that he may be gone by now. When Sheriff Malcom went back to take a look, he said there was no spaceship in sight. If that thing went back to wherever it came from, we haven't got a chance of making anyone believe us."

"Is there any way of getting me out of here?" Janice asked.

Thorne grinned wryly. "Not while you're wearing that thing."

"That thing" was a white, one-piece Mother Hubbard nightgown—hospital type.

"They took my clothes away from me," she said bitterly.

Thorne stood up. "I'll see your father. He'll make Candor see the light. We'll get you out of here as soon as—"

The door opened suddenly, and the attendant stepped in. Behind him, in the hall, was

another attendant. Both of them had suspicion written all over their faces in bold type.

"Are you Dr. Enroth?" the first one asked.

"I am," said Thorne with dignity.

He stared uneasily from one to the other.

"Dr. Candor is here," the larger of the two attendants said. "He's downstairs, says he'd like to see you."

"Very fine," Thorne said. "I'm happy to know Bob's arrived. We haven't seen each other since—"

"Skip it," the second attendant grunted. "The doctor says he's never heard of any psychiatrist named Enroth in his life."

"Incredible! Why, we—"

"Look, buddy, don't try to snow us. Come on in this next room, and we'll wait in here for the doctor to come up and see who you are."

"Very well," said Thorne fussily. "But this is the most absurd and preposterous kind of circumlocution, and I'll see to it that Bob Candor gets to hear of what you're trying to do."

The smaller attendant produced a capacious key ring and unlocked a room adjoining the one they were in. Thorne saw that it was a per-

fectly bare room with a small chair in it. It was an ideal cell for a recalcitrant patient—or for a suspected criminal at large in the ward.

"In here, buddy."

"Enroth" took two steps in the direction the attendant pointed, grumbling angrily all the time. Then, approaching the door to the adjoining room, he suddenly whirled, scooped up Janice's nightstand, and rammed it into the stomach of the nearest attendant with an agility that must have seemed astonishing, coming from a man of his apparent years.

The attendant recoiled backward, gasping for breath, and the other one came toward him. As Thorne squared away to face the new adversary, he caught out of the corner of his eye a flash of bare legs as Janice leaped lightly from her bed.

"Jan!" he called, as he fended a blow. "Close the outside door! Keep the rest of the attendants out!"

The girl hastened to shut the door, and Thorne noted with approval her trim form as she crossed the room. Then he gave his full attention to the guards.

The man with the keys had still not yet fully recovered from the butt amidships with

the nightstand, and he was reeling unsteadily, supporting himself against the metal headboard of Janice's bed. The other attendant, small, squat, and burly, was moving menacingly forward, fists clenched and eyes aflame.

"Come on, Ed," the attendant snarled. "Get up and let's take the old geezer." He stepped forward and closed with Thorne.

Dan felt a pile-driver left elude his guard and sink in just above his heart, and heard Janice's little scream. He countered immediately, rocking the attendant with a savage right cross and following it with a straight left jab that penetrated the thick layers of muscle and fat over the man's stomach and left him gasping for breath.

That took care of the small attendant for the moment—but now the other one had recovered somewhat, and was coming back searching for vengeance. He moved in on Thorne, glaring coldly, and circled around him, while the smaller attendant fought to recover his breath.

The big man licked out a quick jab that left Dan swaying, but Thorne hammered back immediately, catching the side of the other's face

and leaving a long, livid welt on his cheek. Then both attendants closed around him, and Dan fought back desperately. He sensed the presence of Janice somewhere outside the milling trio, and knew that the girl was trying to do her bit in the struggle.

Suddenly a break came. Dan bowed himself under the double onslaught, tensed his trained muscles, and heaved upward. The two attendants, taken by surprise, bounced out and away. As they fought for balance, Dan reached out, grabbed the arm of the big attendant, and, using him almost as a baseball bat, swung him around, crashing him heavily into the smaller man just behind him.

The other attendant grunted at the moment of impact and went flying into the bare, adjoining room. Instantly Janice dashed over and closed the door of the cell. It locked automatically. That reduced the opposition to just one, and he was in none too good shape.

Dan advanced on him and brought him to his knees with a series of deadly close-in jabs, reached down, and grabbed the jangling key-ring. He turned to Janice, who was white-faced with terror.

"Let's get out of here," he

said. "Before the whole place is down around us."

"But I'm not dressed!" Jan protested, indicating the one-piece nightgown that was all she was wearing.

"We'll worry about that later," Dan said through bruised lips. "The important thing is to get out of here!"

He pushed his silvery hair back into a semblance of order, tucked in his shirt, and opened the door. "Let's go," he said, eyeing the unconscious guard on the floor.

They went out, and Dan heard the door click automatically closed behind them, locking it from the inside. It was, he knew, a precautionary measure—and this time it was working in his favor. Those two guards would be in there until someone thought of checking.

They came to a door at the end of the corridor. Dan rattled the keyring hurriedly, trying each until one of the keys sank in. He threw the door open, and, taking Janice by the hand, led her through into the next corridor.

There, too, there was a lock to be opened, and that required the expense of precious seconds. Dan expected to be discovered any moment, and hoped he'd be able to bluff his

way in that case. He wouldn't be able to fight off the whole sanitarium.

At last they passed through the final door and out on the grounds. It was a warm, sunny afternoon, but the cool air of the ocean breeze whispered between the buildings. Dan saw Janice shiver a little and draw her gown tighter.

"We'll be someplace safe soon," he said soothingly. "It's all going to come out all right, baby."

"I hope so," Janice said fervently. "But that hideous creature—"

"Don't think about it," he told her. "There's time to worry about that later. Let's concentrate on getting out of here, first. That's our big problem at the moment."

They crossed the neatly-manicured lawn, rounded a corner in the path. There, in front of the attractive, white-stuccoed main building, Thorne saw an auto—Dr. Candor's car.

"Let's go," he said. They crossed the lawn at a quick trot. The car's doors were unlocked, and Dan and Janice climbed in.

"I hope he's fool enough to leave his keys in the car," Dan said. He fumbled around near the ignition lock for a moment, and shook his head

angrily. "No luck." He turned to Janice. "Got a hairpin?"

"They took them away from me when they brought me here," she said. "Oh, hurry! Someone's coming!"

Dan glanced up and saw that someone, indeed, was heading toward them. Hastily, he ripped off his tieclip, jammed it up behind the ignition lock, and shorted the ignition.

The car rumbled into life just as the astonished Dr. Candor approached. Dan drove out of the sanitarium full speed ahead.

TO: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III
FROM: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI

SHIP I-69 ARRIVED TODAY, REASONABLY MUCH AS PROMISED, AND WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR THIS MINOR BLESSING. I WISH TO APOLOGIZE FOR MY IMPATIENCE. HOWEVER, THERE'S ONE TRIVIAL POINT YOU MIGHT CARE TO KNOW. ALTHOUGH THE SHIP ARRIVED, KRROBEK DID NOT. WE ARE UNDERSTANDABLY UNHAPPY OVER THIS.

WE'VE SOLD YOUR DAMNED PACKING-CASE FOR SALVAGE, TO SAVE

US THE TROUBLE OF SENDING YOU THE BILLS FOR THESE INTERSTELLAR COMMUNICATIONS. SUPPOSE YOU GET ON THE BALL NOW AND GET KRROBEK TO US. THIS IS CAUSING A HORRIBLE FOULUP IN OUR BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

THERE PROBABLY WON'T BE TIME FOR A SUBSTITUTE. I SUGGEST YOU TRACK DOWN KRROBEK ON WHATEVER WORLD I-69 LANDED, BEFORE KRROBEK IS SERIOUSLY DAMAGED. AND SOMEONE WILL HAVE TO ANSWER FOR THIS IF KRROBEK IS NOT HERE DOUBLE QUICK.

BEST ALWAYS, AND SORRY TO BE SO WORDY IN A COLLECT MESSAGE.

LLOGEL

Four hours later, Dan Thorne was pushing his Buick down the coast road toward Arborville. It had been a rough four hours. He had taken Janice to Los Angeles and made Jerry Kleinschmidt hide her in a small hotel under an assumed name. Then he'd removed the "Enroth" disguise, abandoned Candor's car where it would be sure to be found, and headed back to Arborville in his own car.

Someway, somehow, he had to get himself and Janice off the hook. Not only their reputations, but their freedom was at stake.

Arborville didn't look like a sleepy California town when he pulled in in front of the Santa Barbara Hotel. There were people scattered in little clumps all up and down the main street, talking and chattering excitedly. He walked into the lobby of the hotel to find Sheriff Malcom waiting for him. The tall, lean officer uncoiled himself and walked over to Thorne.

"Good evening, Mr. Thorne; could I have a word with you?"

Thorne eyed him sharply. "Do you want to arrest me again?"

Malcom grinned and shook his head. "Not me—at least, not until I have to, y'know." He lowered his voice so that no one else in the lobby could hear him. "But the FBI may want to talk to you eventually."

"The FBI? What for?"

"Kidnapping is the charge. And the state police are looking for you on an auto theft rap. Of course, they don't know it was you—yet."

"What do you mean?" Thorne felt trapped.

"I mean that they haven't

got around to figuring out who Dr. Enroth was yet. The description doesn't tally with yours at all. But they'll figure it out eventually, and when they do, I'm afraid you'll be in for a bit of trouble."

"If you're so sure of yourself," said Thorne, "why haven't you told them what you suspect?"

The Englishman's eyes grew serious. "Because I know you're not lying. I don't want you to get angry, so I'll tell you why I've done what I've done. I've been in this country for twenty years; been a citizen for ten. I *like* being sheriff, and I don't want to lose the job, if you follow me.

"Very well, then. Last night there was a bit of a rumpus out at Hadley's, as you bloody well know. I went out to the beach by myself to look for this golden ship of yours."

"And you didn't find it," said Thorne.

"I didn't say that," Malcom reminded him. "I said that it wasn't there. It wasn't. But here's what I did see: I saw that ship rising in the air as I approached it. I hit it with the spotlight on my car and watched it go straight up until it was out of sight. It started off slowly, like a balloon rising, then it went faster and

faster until it was gone. No rockets or anything; it just moved up by itself."

"Why didn't you say something about it?" Thorne was angry. "Janice and I wouldn't be in this mess now if you'd mentioned that!"

"I'm not so sure. I rather imagine all three of us would be in the soup. They'd think we were all off our rockers. Besides, if it came before a jury or anything like that, a smart attorney could make it seem that I'd only seen a weather balloon or the planet Venus or something of the kind.

"The point is that I'm still keeping my mouth shut, and this time, it's in your favor."

"Fine. Just great," Thorne said bitterly. "But they'll find out eventually, and when they do, what are you going to do? Just sit around on your fat tail while they lock Janice up in the booby bin and pack me off to Alcatraz?"

"I don't think it'll come to that," Malcom said. "I'll testify in court if I have to. Meanwhile, I want to get more corroborative evidence. My men and I are going out to that beach in daylight and go over the place thoroughly. If the monster took off in his ship, he won't be around, but he may have left some evi-

dence behind that will at least prove that Miss Hadley wasn't having hallucinations. Do you want to go with us?"

Thorne didn't hesitate. "Count me in," he said.

They left for the beach immediately, in the sheriff's small sedan. The police were already out there, milling aimlessly over the beach. Thorne spotted half a dozen men, led by Sergeant Wheeler.

The deputy came over to them, looking glum.

"Hello, chief."

"What's up, Wheeler?"

"Nothing," the thick-featured policeman said. "We've been combing this beach for the last half hour or more, and no sign of anything but seashells."

"Keep looking," Malcom said cheerfully. "Don't give up."

Wheeler scratched his head. "Sure thing," he said. "Just one question, though."

"What's that?"

"Tell me, boss—what in hell are we looking for?"

"Evidence," said Malcom.

"Oh," said Wheeler, glaring angrily at Thorne. "What about Miss Hadley?"

"She's in Dr. Candor's rest home," Thorne said quickly, hoping the word of her kidnapping hadn't spread so

widely that he was supposed to know about it.

"Like hell she is," Wheeler retorted. "She was grabbed out of there by some fat kidnapper this morning. Or shouldn't I be telling him this?" he asked Malcom.

"Janice kidnapped! Great Scott!" Thorne burst out in mock horror. "What steps are being taken to find her?"

"The FBI's out looking for the kidnapper now. It's out of our province. But we can help." Malcom turned to Wheeler. "That kidnapper may be the same man who perpetrated the original attack on Miss Hadley. And he may very well be hiding out in the cliff area along this beach. Spread out and look around, and whistle if you find anything suspicious."

"Yes, sir," Wheeler said grudgingly, glaring at Thorne.

He turned and trudged away across the beach.

"Good show," Malcom said approvingly. "But I hope we find something more solid to go by than what we've got. I'd hate to have to go into court and talk about golden space-ships that aren't there."

Dan and the sheriff prowled the beach together for the next half hour, while the other six policemen split up and

ranged through the twisted heap of rocks that lined the shore.

Suddenly a scream of horror rent the air, followed by two pistol-shots.

"Aaaargh!"

The cry boomed out over the lonely beach. Thorne, who had been bending over a depression in the sand that might just have once been a footprint, looked up in alarm at the terrible sound.

"That was Wheeler," Malcolm said.

"Sounds bad," said Dan. "Where'd it come from?"

By now the other policemen, their faces white and tense, had come running up to join them. "It came from back there," one of them said, gesturing to a looming curtain of rock that dropped to the sea about half a mile up ahead. "He was in there, somewhere."

Then, a second time, the scream resounded over the beach. Their faces set and grim, the seven men began to run toward the cliff.

After no more than a hundred yards, they stopped. There was no need to go further.

For, emerging from behind the outcropping, was a nightmare *thing* that could have

risen from the deepest pit. Fifteen feet high, its eyes two flaming orange beacons, its hideous noseless face leering at them, was—what?

Instantly Dan remembered Janice's description. A beast with seven tails, she had said. Well, the description might almost fit. Seven long, thin caudal spines projected from the beast's back; they might almost be considered tails.

It was lumbering across the beach now, within plain sight. The men were rooted to the sand in astonishment and terror. Dan could well understand Janice's emotions when she had first encountered the thing. It was loathsome, utterly horrible to behold.

But more horror was yet to come.

As the creature approached, Dan made out something clutched in one of its four dangling arms. It seemed like a limp rag doll—and then what it actually was became painfully clear. It was the shattered, torn body of Sergeant Wheeler.

The monster was carrying the policeman gently almost delicately. But those razor-sharp claws must have wreaked unholy agony first.

They stood still, and the beast moved closer. It was now only about a thousand

feet away. It spied the waiting policemen.

"The devil," Malcom murmured. "The bloody devil!" He drew his gun.

"Put that thing away," Thorne snapped. "Wheeler evidently tried to shoot the creature, and must have driven it wild."

"You're right," said Malcom. He re-holstered the gun and looked up.

The monster had stopped and was standing some eight hundred feet away, cradling the broken body of Wheeler in its arms. It stared at the seven men for a moment or two, then dropped the body to the sand, where it rolled limply into a heap. A thick red trickle of blood stained the sand.

Then it turned, without further ado, and ponderously moved off in the direction from which it came.

Dan was shocked—not so much by the ugliness of the beast, hideous though it was, as by a sort of retrospective feeling of sympathy for Janice. It was impossible to imagine what the girl had gone through when the thing had picked her up and slit her bathing suit off, but it was incredible that she had come through the unnerving experience with her sanity intact

Wheeler was a mess. Malcom stripped off the trenchcoat he invariably wore and threw it over the body

"It won't be easy to tell his wife," he said. "Wheeler went like a hero."

"I doubt that," Dan said. "I don't mean to take anything away from him, but a smarter man might have come out of it alive. After all, the monster didn't harm Janice—she says it was gentle to her. Wheeler must have tried to shoot the beast."

"Poor fool," Malcom said gently. "As if that puny .38 of his could have gotten through that matted hide."

He signalled to two of the policemen, who picked up the body and began to carry it to the waiting police car. Then he turned back to Dan.

"Well, it's in the open now. It's no longer just the story of a hysterical girl, now. We've got witnesses, and we have a martyr. If we only had that spaceship, now!"

"You think it's extra-terrestrial, then?" Dan asked.

"Definitely" said Malcom. "Incredible as it seems. But where on Earth could have produced such a creature?"

Dan nodded. "The golden spaceship must have brought it here, let the beast loose, and gone back to wherever it

came from." He paled. "Is this some sort of alien invasion, I wonder? Maybe these things have been let loose all over the world, to drive Earth into a state of terror and soften us up for the invasion that'll follow."

"We'll know soon enough," Malcom said. "The problem at hand is to trap the one beast we know about, before it causes any further terror. Come on; we'll have to get the FBI off Dr. Enroth's trail and get them looking for this beast!"

TO: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI
FROM: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III

WE'RE REALLY SORRY ABOUT THIS LATEST ERROR. APPARENTLY SHIP I-69 UNLOADED AND RELEASED KRROBEK INADVERTENTLY. REST ASSURED THAT STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN TO REMEDY THIS SITUATION AT ONCE. I.O.C.C. WILL GUARANTEE FULL INDEMNITY FOR ANY LOSSES YOU MAY SUFFER AS A RESULT OF THIS DELAY IN TRANSIT. AGAIN, OUR APOLOGIES.

MELWAR

By the next day, the news
THE BEAST WITH 7 TAILS

was splattered all over the California seaboard, and the wire services were picking it up as fast as information came in. Neither the FBI nor the local police seemed interested in Daniel Thorne anymore, nor was Candor any too anxious to press charges against Dan for the theft of his car. Now that Janice had been proven sane, the psychiatrist was in no mood to display the fact that he had made an erroneous diagnosis. His deflated ego was thoroughly smothered by his superego.

Dan Thorne sat in the sheriff's office along with assorted Federal, State, and local cops, plus a smattering of Army men. The air outside hummed with the whirling motors of helicopters that were searching the area square mile by square mile. The only trouble was that there was a devil of a lot of square miles to cover.

Sheriff Malcom's lean face was covered with perspiration; the room was hot and there were too many people in it.

"There's no telling what it will take to kill that thing," one of the Army officers said. "According to the sheriff, a .38 slug doesn't even make it flinch."

A couple of other officials

were pouring over maps of the vicinity, trying to figure out where the great beast could be hiding.

All the ranches in the area had been taken over by the Army in order to protect the local citizenry, and a barricade had been set up around the whole county to prevent the beast's escaping. Meanwhile, tanks and Infantry troops were combing the countryside.

Some of the bigshots obviously did not believe that the thing was as big as it was claimed to be, and quite probably wouldn't have believed the story at all if it hadn't been that Wheeler's mangled body was hard to explain away.

One of the deputies came in and tapped Dan on the shoulder. "Mr. Thorne, there's a man out here to see you. Says you know him; says his name is Forester."

Dan got up and walked out of the office into the blazing sun of the street. Sure enough, it was J. Eckman Forester himself. A self-styled expert on practically everything, Forester was nonetheless of importance in the movie world. He had connections with most of the big studios and had produced a couple of Grade B pictures that had

made money in spite of their corniness. He was a tall, round-faced man with wavy brown hair, a neatly clipped mustache, and rimless glasses. His usually smiling face looked worried.

"Dan!" he shouted as soon as Thorne stepped out of the busy office. "Dan! Listen, we've got to do something; we can't let them kill this thing!"

"Are you nuts, Forester? What—"

"Don't you see? This is the opportunity of a lifetime! An intelligent alien from Outer Space has landed for the first time in human history! And we are acting like a bunch of wild animals!"

Thorne put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "I see what you mean, Forester, but, dammit, this thing is dangerous."

"Dangerous! Sure it's dangerous! Wouldn't you be dangerous if you landed on a planet full of midgets that were trying to kill you? Look at the facts, man; the facts! Did he hurt Janice when he picked her up? No. He scared her, sure, but he couldn't help that. And maybe he would have been just as scared of her if he'd been smaller."

"What about the cop?" Dan asked.

"What about him? He saw the alien and fired. He tried to kill it. What would you have done in his place? Just stand there and let something shoot at you? No! You'd defend yourself, wouldn't you? And that's all this thing did. He didn't try to kill any of the other cops, did he?"

"I say that if we try to kill this visitor, we'll be making one of the greatest mistakes in human history. Think of the wealth of information he might have! Think of having travel to the planets without recourse to clumsy rockets! Think of—"

"Think of people getting killed while we try to save your pet's life," snorted Dan. "Besides, even if this were true, what makes you think I could do anything about it? It's in the hands of the Army now, and I don't have any pull with the Pentagon. And I don't know J. Edgar Hoover personally, either."

"Dan, I'm ashamed of you," said Forester. "You have no imagination, no foresight. If this alien were treated kindly, we could establish communication with him. If we insist on hunting him down like a wild beast, we'll deserve nothing but the same treatment from him. What will

happen when his people find out what we've done?"

Dan shook his head. "I'll admit you may have a point, Forester, but I *saw* this thing, and so did Janice. The expression on that face had nothing of human kindness in it; those red eyes glowed with pure malignant hatred. It was nothing spawned of sweetness and light, believe me."

"I suppose you think Janice looked pretty to him? I doubt it. He probably thinks we look pretty horrible, too. I'm going to see what can be done to at least capture him alive."

"That's okay with me, Forester, if you think it can be done. What do you want me to do about it, though?"

"Just introduce me to some of those men inside," Forester said. "I'll see if I can talk some sense into their heads."

"On your head be it," said Dan, shrugging. "Come on inside." It might be possible, at that, Dan thought. J. Eckman Forester did wield quite a bit of influence, and he might be right in supposing that the monster meant no harm.

He picked out one of the higher ranking officers, introduced Forester, and quietly walked away while Forester expounded his theory.

Dan decided there wasn't really much use of his hang-

ing around the office any more. He'd told the FBI and the police and the Army everything he knew at least a dozen times over. He'd described the interior of the spaceship to an artist who'd tried to sketch it from his description. Dan was tired of listening to the hubbub; it wasn't his worry any more. Let the Army take care of it. He walked out of the office and across the street to the bar of the Santa Barbara.

It was a mistake; the place was full of newspaper reporters who recognized Daniel Thorne as soon as he walked in. They mobbed him, and it took him the better part of ten minutes to tell them as much as he could. It would mean headlines, of course, but now they wouldn't be so damaging to his career; in fact, they'd probably be helpful.

"Dan! Dan!"

At the sound of the voice, Thorne turned his head. It was Janice. Cameramen pushed the reporters out of the way and began snapping their cameras. The air flickered with the blue-white glare of flashbulbs.

"Janice! What did you come back up here for? Why didn't you stay in L. A.?" Dan whispered.

She smiled. "What? And

miss all the fun? Besides, there wasn't any reason to stay now that Candor has decided to be sensible. And I wanted to be near you."

The flashbulbs stopped popping for a bit, and Dan said: "Okay, boys, that's enough for a while. We're both pretty tired, and we'd like to have a drink in peace."

The reporters and cameramen grinned and let the two sit down at a table.

"You look tired," Janice said, after their drinks had come.

"I am. I didn't get a wink of sleep last night; the cops kept me awake trying to get a description of the monster and the ship—especially the ship."

"Why don't you finish your drink and get a little shut-eye," she suggested.

"My idea exactly," Dan agreed.

"Did you know that J. Eckman Forester is here?" Janice asked.

"I saw him. He's got some screwy idea that we ought to talk to the monster."

Janice nodded. "That's what he told me. You know, Dan, maybe he's right."

"Would you want to talk to that thing after what happened the other day?" Dan asked.

"I don't know," Janice said.

"I'll admit I was terrified, but if I knew beforehand that he was coming, maybe the shock wouldn't be there. After all, he's not much uglier than a wart-hog, when you come right down to it."

"I suppose not," said Dan, "but I don't fancy having conversation with a wart-hog, either."

Janice smiled prettily. "I guess not. Still, if the thing really is intelligent, it seems a shame to kill it."

"Maybe Forester can talk the Army into just capturing it. Meanwhile, I'm going to get some sleep. You're going to stay around town, aren't you?"

She nodded. "I've got a room here at the hotel. Dad didn't think I ought to go out to the ranch just yet."

"I think he's right," Dan said. "Let's just stick tight and see what happens."

He stood up, trying to keep from yawning. He didn't want to leave Jan, but he was so tired he could hardly stand. "I'll see you in a couple of hours, honey. 'Bye."

There was a rap at the door. A pause. The knock was repeated, louder this time.

Dan Thorne rolled over in bed and looked up groggily.

"Who is it?"

"Malcom," said the voice. "Can I come in?"

Dan got up and walked to the door. He threw back the bolt and admitted the sheriff. "What's new, Sheriff?"

Malcom shook his head. "Nothing much. I just got awfully tired of the heat and decided to find an air-conditioned room. Yours was handy."

"What time is it?"

"Six thirty. You've had about four hours sleep."

"Damn!" said Thorne feelingly.

"I'm really sorry to wake you up," Malcom said, "but I wanted to talk to you about this Forester fellow. Bit of an odd chap, isn't he?" The sheriff eased himself into a chair as he spoke.

"Somewhat of a screwball, I guess," Dan said. He fished a cigarette out of the pack on the night table and lit it.

"The military wouldn't pay any attention to him," said Malcom. "He was furious. He's gone out to see Tom Hadley. He seems to think that if he can convince Hadley, the two of them could convince the Army that the thing ought to be taken alive."

Dan smiled sardonically. "He'll never convince Hadley; not after the way Jan was treated."

Malcom nodded. "He knew that. But he talked the Hadley girl into his scheme, and the two of them drove out toward Hadley's ranch to convince Tom."

"What?" Dan jumped to his feet and began dressing as though Satan himself were on his trail. "And you let them go?"

"Not much I could do to stop them," Malcom said. "But I figured we might as well follow them to make sure they don't get into a jam."

"You certainly take a long time in getting to the point," Dan growled.

"Sorry. Here. You'll need this, perhaps."

Dan looked at the gun Malcom was holding. "A .38 won't do any good against that thing," he said.

"This isn't a .38; it's a .357 Magnum, the most powerful handgun made. And I've got a couple of rifles in the car. Come along."

The sun was hot as they drove along the almost deserted highway, but the evening breeze had already begun to cool off the air. Above them, like gnats in the sky, floated three Air Force helicopters.

"The sun will be down shortly," Malcom said. "'Copters won't be much use then."

The comment didn't need an answer, and Dan Thorne gave him none.

The sun was a glowing red ball on the horizon by the time they reached the Hadley ranch. As the police car pulled up, Dan jumped out and ran to the house. Tom Hadley was sitting in the living room holding a high-powered rifle on his lap while he read a magazine.

"Have you seen Janice?" Dan asked before the older man could say anything.

Tom Hadley's face looked angry. "Yes. That fool For-ester came here a while back with her. He had some wild scheme to catch the monster alive. Wanted to talk to it or some such rot. He said that it would most likely come back to the place where the ship landed, and that would be the best place to go to find it. I told him what he could do with his idea and ordered him to take Jan back to town, where she'll be safe."

Dan's eyes blazed. "He didn't do it! We'd have passed him on the road if he had! That fool thinks he can communicate with that beast, and he'll kill himself trying. Come on! Bring that rifle with you!"

Hadley didn't waste any time asking questions. He fol-

lowed Dan out to the car on the run and piled in after him. Malcom let out on the clutch, and the police car roared down the road toward the beach.

TO: LLOGEL REMM,
DANNISET VI
FROM: MELWAR DOSS,
I.O.C.C., VIBAN III

WE'VE DISCOVERED
THE PLANET ON WHICH
KRROBEK IS ASTRAY,
AND A G E N T S HAVE
BEEN DESPATCHED.
RECOVERY IS H O P E D
FOR ALOST IMMEDIATE-
LY.

PLEASE BEAR WITH US
JUST A LITTLE LONGER.
MELWAR

Shadows of nightfall were beginning to drop. The beach was dark and quiet, except for the buzzing of the rotors of the Air Force 'copters above.

They pulled up on the sand and burst from the car—Malcom, Hadley, and Dan. Above, the helicopters could be seen hovering idly, as if their operators were unsure of what to do next.

Dan squinted down the beach. "Look!" he gasped. "All the way down there!"

He pointed out toward the dark, swirling water of the

Pacific, about half a mile down the beach.

The other two men stared.

Standing at the water's edge, its thick, repulsive legs in about a foot of water, was the beast. As they looked, a spotlight picked it out, illuminating it against the shimmering surface of the water. It was standing there, its four arms swinging loosely at its sides.

And—standing in front of it, at the beach's end, with the water lapping around their feet—were Forester and Janice!

"Idiots!" Dan exclaimed bitterly.

"What are we going to do?" asked Thomas Hadley.

"It's hard to say," the sheriff replied. "We're in a bit of a tight spot. As long as the beast makes no overt attack, we don't dare run the risk of galvanizing it into action by shooting at it. That was Wheeler's mistake; and we're not going to do the same thing."

"Look at them," Dan said. "Talking a blue streak. I wonder what they're saying!"

"Doesn't matter," grunted Malcom. "We'll just have to wait until the parley's over, and hope for the best."

Uneasily, the three of them edged closer to the trio near

the water, while the helicopters converged on the scene. Malcom gestured up to them to hold back, and they paused, hovering where they were.

Jan and Forester were addressing the monster, who was watching patiently, moving its arms slowly back and forth. Then, suddenly, the conference came to an abrupt end.

The monster reached down and sent Forester sprawling with a backhanded blow. The big man was knocked down into the surf, and Dan saw his ever-present glasses go flying through the air.

As Forester dazedly began crawling back to shore, the monster reached down a second time—and seized Janice!

Dan saw Thomas Hadley, at his side, go white.

"Easy, Mr. Hadley," he cautioned. "Stay calm. The monster didn't harm Janice the last time."

"That was the last time," Hadley lippled thinly. He looked impotently at the high-power rifle in his hands. "I don't dare use this, now."

"You don't dare is right!" Dan said. He looked apprehensively down the beach, and saw that the monster was once again cradling Janice delicately in its two front arms. And now it was leaving

the water, starting to cross the beach toward the jutting cliffs, still grasping her.

"The devil!" Malcom exclaimed. "Come on—let's follow them along the beach!"

Dan felt himself grow cold with fear as he watched the beast taking giant steps across the beach, and he heard Janice's tinny screaming from far-off.

She was writhing frantically, struggling to escape from the monster's grip. Dan, followed closely by Hadley and Malcom, dashed up the side of the beach. The monster had reached the edge of the cliffs now, and was leaning against the cold, dark rock, examining the girl with evident curiosity.

As Dan drew close, he was relieved to see it still had made no move toward harming the girl, but held her gently in its hands. Dan saw that Janice, in her frenzied struggles to escape from its grasp, had ripped her clothes to shreds on its razor-keen claws. Her shirt was in tatters, with glimpses of rosy flesh visible beneath, and her jodhpurs were slashed from thigh to ankle.

The helicopters hovered low.

"We could bomb the thing out of existence," Malcom

muttered. "If it were only for the girl—"

"He doesn't seem to be harming her," Hadley said, to reassure himself of his daughter's safety. "But how can we get him to put her down? We don't dare shoot—not with Jan there!"

"I've got an idea," Dan said, staring grimly at the dread scene before him. "Give me your rifle, Mr. Hadley."

"What are you going to do?" he demanded. "You can't shoot!"

"I don't intend to," he said. "You wait here—and pray for me. For both of us. For all of us."

As they watched anxiously, Dan darted around to the side and began to scale the steep cliff a hundred feet from the girl and the motionless beast. Grasping the rifle firmly, he pulled himself up the tortuous incline until he reached the top. He waved to the men in the low-hovering helicopters.

Then he headed across the cliff's face to a point directly over the beast's head. He looked down.

Moonlight illuminated the scene. Standing directly below, he saw the beast, its back to the cliff. Out before it, standing like two terror-stricken statues, were Sheriff

Malcom and the girl's father.

And held in the thing's loathsome grasp was Janice, her shirt nearly ripped off and her face a mask of horror.

Dan waved the gun high over his head to show the two men on the sands where he was. Then he stared directly down. The monster's head and shoulders were some ten feet below him. He hefted the gun.

Janice was down below, held on the monster's right side by two arms. Dan waited, biding his time, sighting along the cool barrel of the gun.

Janice was still struggling frantically, and it was impossible to fire. Dan studied the situation. The hand that was holding her was facing palm upward, and he could make out a fine network of purplish veins running along the up-turned wrist.

Then his gaze shifted to the animal's head, and he noted a small red patch over which none of the coarse gray hair grew, right in the center of the beast's skull.

A vulnerable point? It looked that way. He would have to risk it.

He leaned down and called softly, "*Jan! Jan! Stop struggling! Relax and stay still!*"

The girl ceased her kicking and looked up in surprise.

"It's me—Dan! Up here! Hold still so I can take aim!"

He brought the gun down slowly. He didn't dare aim for the vulnerable-looking spot along the skull; even if his guess about it were right, a shot there might touch off a paroxysm that would result in Janice's getting crushed.

No. There was another way.

He stared down at the outstretched hand holding Janice. She was quiet now, though her breasts were heaving from her exertions. He took careful aim at the monster's wrist, breathed deeply, and pumped three shots into the network of veins.

There was a tremendous half-strangled cry as the bullets penetrated the beast's nervous system. Then Dan saw the half-nude form of Janice drop to the sands below, as the animal lost control over its hand.

In the same instant, Dan leaped. Gauging his fall carefully, he landed full athwart the monster's shoulders. He took a firm grip in the thick fur. The animal, clutching its wounded wrist, did not even notice him.

Looking out, he saw that Janice was safely clear. With great deliberation, he lifted the rifle high overhead, tensed his muscles, and brought it

down with all his might on the naked-looking red spot on the beast's skull. He heard a loud *crack!*

Dan sprang clear and let himself fall to the sands below, just as the monster began to topple like a felled pine.

Dan leaped clear and rolled as he struck the sand. Almost immediately, he was on his feet again, his rifle levelled at the prostrate monster.

"No! Don't fire!" It was Forester. He blinked owlishly, trying to focus his eyes without the glasses, which had now been irretrievably lost in the surf. "Don't shoot him! If he's still alive, we may have a chance!"

The monster didn't move.

By this time, two helicopters were dropping swiftly toward the beach, and a wailing of sirens could be heard in the distance. Evidently, Malcom had called for help over his own radio. The forces of humanity were moving in on the now helpless beast.

A State Police 'copter was the first to land, and three men came running out of it, carrying leg irons. Handcuffs would never have encircled the beast's massive limbs, but the leg irons just barely made it around its wrists. Another 'copter landed.

Within a few minutes, the monster was thoroughly trussed up in leg irons and padlocked chains. It would have taken the power of a railroad locomotive to burst those bonds.

The monster was still breathing, his breath coming in long, slow wheezes. Dan stood over him, still holding the rifle.

"Well, we've got him—thanks to you, Mr. Thorne," said one of the policemen. "Question is: What do we do next?"

Dan turned and looked at Forester. "The first thing I'm going to do is club a certain guy over the head." He advanced toward Forester, a dangerous look in his eyes.

But Forester wasn't looking at Dan Thorne. He was staring, wide-eyed into the sky. "Look!" he shouted hoarsely. "Look! Up there!"

They all looked up.

There, high above them in the sky, was a huge, glowing, golden egg which was dropping slowly towards them. It looked as though it were going to crush them all.

"It's the aliens!" screamed Forester as he broke and ran for the cliffs. "They'll kill us all for hurting one of their kind! Run! Run!"

His hysterical words start-

ed nearly everyone running away from the beach. Dan grabbed Janice's arm. "Let's go, Jan. That thing looks as though it wants to land on the beach, and it's too big for me to argue with."

From the comparative safety of the cliffs, they watched the gigantic ship settle slowly to the sand. It was far larger than the little golden shell which had brought the beast; it towered a good hundred feet in the air.

Nearby, Dan could hear the muffled voice of one of the Army men talking into a walkie-talkie, asking for tanks to surround the beach. Only a big gun could breach the hull of such a vessel.

Then a voice came from the big ship. But it wasn't exactly a voice, either. It seemed to be inside their heads, ringing inside their skulls.

I see that you're armed, said the telepathic voice. Please do not fire. It wouldn't do you any good, and we mean no harm. We will defend ourselves if we must, however.

I am Melwar Doss, of the planet Viban III. We have come to get the Krrobek. I am going to step out of the air-lock now; I warn you not to shoot.

A door opened in the side

of the huge golden spaceship, and a figure stepped out.

Since everyone there was expecting a duplicate of the fallen monster to come from the ship, they were all surprised to see that Melwar Doss looked a great deal like an ordinary human being.

"I'm going to take a chance," whispered Dan. Handing his rifle to Janice, he started walking toward the ship, his hands in the air.

"I'm not armed," he called. "We just want to know what this is all about."

You have every right to know, said Melwar Doss. *We are sorry that the Krrobek got loose on your planet. They are very dangerous unless properly handled. I hope you weren't forced to kill it.*

"I don't think it's dead," Dan said. "I had to slug him on that pink spot on his head, though."

Perfectly all right, Doss said. *That's where the controller is attached when a Krrobek is being used. A Krrobek, you see, is an organic computer. When an electrical controller is connected to its brain, it works like a robot brain or an electronic computer. They're very expensive, of course.*

"And very ugly," Dan said.

You might think of them as ugly, I suppose, Doss said. *We are quite used to them. They're harmless as long as they are under control. And now, if you please, we're ready to try to get the Krrobek into the ship.*

"He's all yours," Dan said.

Thank you. Now that we know your planet is inhabited, we will return. I'm sure we can come to terms that will be to our mutual advantage. After all—he smiled—business is business. And we are, above all, businessmen.

A pale green ray shot out of the ship, and the trussed Krrobek floated into the air and was drawn into the ship.

Thank you again, said Melwar Doss. *And goodbye until later.*

He went inside the ship, and the door closed after him. A few seconds later, the ship lifted into the air and vanished into the sky.

Dan Thorne turned around and saw J. Eckman Forester standing beside him.

"I—I—thought—"

"You thought it was intelligent. Maybe it was. A damn sight more than you are, anyway."

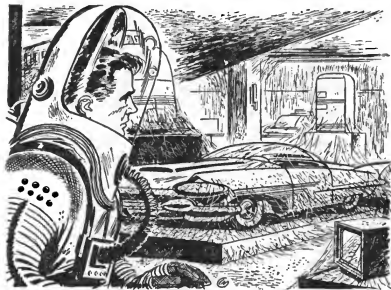
Without another word, he walked away from Forester to where Janice was waiting.

THE END

Vault of the Ages

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

They are sending you into the future to look around. Everything is fine until you come to the times when humanity is going the way of the buffalo and the dodo. Does this worry you? Don't let it. Just write your report and come back or you'll find yourself playing nursemaid and baby-sitter to the last man on earth.



WHEN I agreed to pilot the first time-machine to the future, I expected it to be a quick trip. My instructions were, simply, to look around,

see what the world of Ten Million A.D. was like, and return.

Return! What a sweet word! I often dream of re-

turning to the bustling, crowded world of 2075 I left behind—but here is where I belong, and here is where I must stay.

The time-machine, the first of its kind, seemed to work pretty well after some tests with rabbits and such, and so it was decided to hire a test pilot—me—and see what would happen. I remember the ring of taut, anxious faces that surrounded me in the lab that day as I climbed up the pedestal, threw open the heavy copper door, and got in.

They were all excited. You would have thought they were the ones risking their necks, not me. But that's the way it always is. *They* were worried about the success or failure of their time-travel project; I had nothing to lose but my neck.

So after the proper speeches and impressive-sounding explanations to the press, I was told I could leave. The Big Moment had come. I clanged shut the door, flipped the switch as instructed, and let the cybernetic governors take over control of the time-vessel. I only half believed the thing would work, and I didn't much care. My pay was the same either way.

There was a low singing hum, and I saw the bearded

face of Professor van Brod, who was watching me through the port, melt and swirl as the time-vessel picked up momentum, and then I peered through the port and saw that not only the Professor but also everyone else and the whole laboratory had vanished. I was alone, in the grey nothingness of the space-time continuum.

I looked at my watch. Ten after two. I was scheduled to spend a few hours in the future, and then return to 1975 at precisely quarter-past-two the same day. To the onlookers, only five minutes would have passed, no matter how much time I spent in the future.

I sat back comfortably and waited.

After a while, I got bored watching the grey blankness go whizzing by. The big dial in the front told me that only about three million years had elapsed, and thus I hadn't even reached the halfway point in my journey.

I began to wander around the ship. It was fairly spacious, and well-furnished. There was a goodly library of senso-tapes, and a projector; also a healthy stock of synthetic food concentrates, and a drug closet that included a

considerable supply of rejuvenol, the new miracle rejuvenating drug.

Puzzled, I surveyed the treasure-trove for several minutes, wondering why in blazes a ship expected to be gone for part of a day at most would be stocked with all this stuff.

Then the answer occurred to me, and it didn't make me very happy when I'd figured it out.

They were making sure that I'd be well provided for—in case the ship got stuck somewhere.

This was a trial run. They weren't at all sure the time-vessel was going to function as they expected, and they intended to make things as cozy as possible for their poor test pilot in case he met with some unforeseen fate in the far future, such as discovering that the time-machine went only in one direction—forward.

Professor van Brod had assured me that the journey in both directions would be as safe as a subway ride—but obviously some of the others in the project had their doubts about it, in view of the things that had been packed on board for my benefit.

I stared angrily out at the greyness for a few minutes, annoyed at myself for letting

them mislead me, before it occurred to me that I was being foolish; as a professional test pilot, I'd faced worse dangers than this before, and had somehow always come out mostly in one piece. It was my job. I had no right to kick about possible danger.

I must have dozed off for a while, because the next thing I knew there was a fairly solid *bump!* as the ship settled to the ground. A gong went off, and when I looked up I saw the dial registering Ten Million. End of journey.

I dashed to the porthole and looked out. Well, the ship hadn't been a failure, at least. There was no way of telling where — when — I actually was, but it was definite that the ship had gone *somewhere*. I wasn't in the laboratory any more, for sure.

Outside, everything was perfectly flat and bleak. I saw long vistas of brown, grassless plains, with no trace of mountains; evidently the ceaseless work of the wind had worn away the hills.

Up above was the sun, looking pretty much like the sun I remembered. It seemed a little dimmer, and a little redder, but not very much so.

I flattened my nose against the pane, trying to see around

the corner of the ship. But as far as I could see, there was just this—emptiness.

I checked my guns to see if they were loaded—they were—and, thus armed against any terror the future might hold, I started to heave open the outside door. A minute later, I emerged and dropped lightly to the ground, ten million years ahead.

The air was clean and sweet, with a pleasant cold tang in it. I didn't know what month I'd landed in, of course, but it seemed like late-autumn weather, when the air has that sharp, fresh quality of oncoming winter.

I started to walk. Empty, everywhere—just the endless, unvegetated plain. It was a worn-out planet, or else a very young one. The wild thought struck me that perhaps I'd gone backwards, not forwards, in time. Perhaps, I thought, I had plunged into the misty past, back before the beginning of life.

Then I walked around the ship, and what I saw convinced me that I'd gone in the right direction.

It was a giant building, leaping up from the bare plain like a great gleaming tooth clawing at the sky. All around it was the desolate wasteland,

and the lone skyscraper seemed incredibly incongruous in this vast prairie.

Hesitantly, I moved toward it. It was streamlined and glowing with a radiant warmth that had no particular visible source, and it was windowless. I crossed the half-mile that separated it from my time-vessel quickly, listening to the *thud-thud* of my footsteps as they broke the eternal silence of this distant era.

When I approached, I saw, carved over the door in letters ten feet high, the inscription: *The Vault of the Ages*. I drew forth my camera and photographed it, for use as evidence when I returned.

Then I headed for the doors, and they swung open as I came close to them. I stepped in, and the sound of my foot crossing the threshold was doubled and redoubled fantastically by the echoes, which went running wildly up to the far-off end of the corridor.

I was in a museum—the final museum of mankind.

I wandered through the brightly-lit, dustless, silent hallways for hours, forgetting how the time was passing. It made no difference, anyway; the time-machine was set to return me to a point in time

exactly five minutes after my departure, no matter how much time elapsed for me in the future. And what I saw in the Vault of the Ages was too exciting to come away from voluntarily.

It was nothing less than a record of man's accomplishments, from the very beginnings. Near the front entrance I saw incredibly ancient-looking clay tablets, saw time-yellowed bone knives and chopping tools from the unimaginably distant past.

As I moved on, the exhibits kept pace. There was a colorful reproduction (or was it the original?) of the cave drawings from Altamira, and other relics of primitive man; then I saw the implements of civilization, books, money, tools. There was an automobile there, an amazingly well-preserved Model T. An airplane, a V-2 rocket, every example of man's ingenuity.

But the whole of our paltry two thousand-odd years took up just a tiny part of the museum, for there were ten million years to come. I saw an entire spaceship on the third floor; I saw a model of my time-machine. I saw things I did not understand, and other things I don't want to talk about. I wandered on through the endless halls for hours on

end, just barely scratching the surface of what was to be seen. The museum was a repository for every accomplishment of mankind throughout all his long history.

And then, just as I was starting to feel hunger pangs and was on the point of deciding to turn back and return later, I came to a bend in the corridor. I rounded it, and my eyes were struck with a glowing, luminescent radiance emanating from a large metal door.

I moved closer and read the inscription on it:

MAN'S FINEST ACHIEVEMENT

And as I took another hesitant step closer, I broke the photoelectronic beam and the mighty doors swung open.

Welcome, man of the past, a thin, dry voice said. I stared ahead into the inky blackness that enfolded me, struggling to regain the use of my eyes.

Finally I became used to the dark, and I looked around to see who had spoken. And I saw Them.

There were a dozen of them. Tiny, wrinkled, hideously ancient gnomes, sitting in immense chairs. Their chests were rising and falling, slow-

ly, methodically, but that was the only sign of life.

"Who—who are you?" I stammered.

We are all that is left, said the same voice. And now I realized that no voice had spoken, except in my mind. These ancients were communicating telepathically.

"All?" I asked.

There are twelve of us, the voice said. *Six men, six women. We have been here a thousand years, and we will remain a thousand years more. Someday, perhaps, we will die.*

There was a note of longing in that last sentence, of great age yearning for the long-delayed end. I looked at them—the last twelve men and women of Earth, sitting there like so many dried-up prunes, waiting for death. The race that had done so much, that had left the proud memorial that stood alone on the deserted planet—had come to this. Twelve old fossils, waiting to die.

There were twenty when we came here, another telepathic voice said, taking up the story. *Eight of us have been fortunate. Someday death will come for the rest of us, and we will have ended our long wait.*

I stood in the middle of the

darkened room, feeling their presences around me. "Why has this happened? Why are you here—just waiting to die?"

What else is there to do? one of them asked sadly.

We have grown old, said another. *We can have no children. We feel it is time that mankind's strivings reach their end, and the end is long in coming. Some of us have waited ten thousand years.*

Ten thousand years! No wonder they were tired of life!

It was incredible. The last people on Earth, all long past the age of childbirth, sitting in this vast museum in the darkness at the end of time, their own prime exhibits. And nothing could be done.

Nothing?

Yes, something! The thought struck me at once. I looked around at the twelve living corpses.

"Don't go away," I said. "I'll be right back."

The utter inanity of what I'd just said didn't strike me until I was outside the museum and dashing frantically over the plain back to my ship.

I found what I wanted, and hurried back. Rejuvenol—that was the answer! The miracle drug! Perhaps it might not be

too late to reverse time for these last survivors of man's greatness, to turn the clock back and make them young again!

My employers had thoughtfully included the rejuvenol for my use, in case I was unable to return, and wanted to prolong my life. The newly-discovered drug, the wonder drug of the age, relieved the sufferings of old age, brought about a rebirth of vitality and youthful vigor.

But this was a use its manufacturers had never dreamed of. I was bringing new life to a dying planet!

I followed the path through the winding building to the great shining door once again, and burst in.

What are you going to do?

"I'm going to bring you back to life," I said. "This drug—maybe you don't know about it. It dates from the dawn of time, practically—2075 A.D. My era."

What will it do to us?

"It'll make you young again," I said, as I started to prepare the injections. "You can go out and repeople the Earth, and keep the flame of life going."

Why? Why start all over?

I ignored the mournful question. It seemed to me that there was nothing else I could

do but bring these last men and women from their lethargy, give them the restored vitality that would continue the race, as long as the power to do so was in my hands.

I went up to the first of them, fumbled in its robes—these dried-up ancients were so withered I couldn't tell the men from the women—and found the biceps. I plunged the hypodermic in, then hastily sterilized the needle and ran on to the next, and by the time I had injected the twelfth I saw, gratifyingly, that the first one was already beginning to stir from his eon-old position of repose. He was becoming young again.

Why did you do that to us?
one of them asked.

I only smiled and watched as color flooded back into the faded faces. There was no need to explain now; later, when their minds were young again, they would understand what it was to live, and explore, and take chances—the sort of chances that I took myself, when I signed on for the time-machine job.

I watched the change take place before my eyes, as the years rapidly peeled away from them.

Then, suddenly, a vivid, angry thought struck me. *You*

fool! What kind of dose did you give us?

"The normal dose for an elderly adult," I said. "One cubic centimeter!"

Idiot!

"Why, what's wrong?"

What's wrong, you ask? In ten million years, the human race has evolved, the cold voice said, lecturing me painfully. Our organs are more efficient, our bloodstreams more direct.

Had I miscalculated? They seemed to be growing rapidly younger—too rapidly.

Don't you understand? the voice asked. The dose you gave us was calculated on the basis of the needs of your own clumsy, primitive bodies—not ours. You've given us a gigantic overdose!

I was relieved at that. After all, so what if I'd overdosed them? Rejuvenol, up to now, had been used on people in their seventies and eighties, and it seemed only logical that men and women who dated their ages in thousands of years would need a stronger dose to achieve the same effect. So I wasn't worried.

But the outbreak of violent cries of anger continued, coming in chorus from all twelve, and I began to see that I'd done something terribly

wrong. It became more apparent, as the character of the cries changed from roars of anger to high-pitched, wordless whines.

In a couple of hours, the transformation was complete, and I looked at the product of my handiwork: twelve naked, squalling babies!

I was responsible for this, and it was my duty now to help them and care for them.

That was five years ago, and they're growing up into nice little toddlers now. I didn't dare leave them and go back to 2075 for help, out of fear that they'd lock me up and put me away; I couldn't risk that, not with twelve helpless babies to take care of!

So I've stayed here, stranded ten million years in the future, waiting for these kids to grow up. Luckily, the Vault of the Ages had some diapers and such things preserved in its all-embracing collections.

I figure another five years and it'll be safe to leave the kids to rebuild society on their own. And then I'll go back to 2075, and won't they be surprised when I come out of that machine fifteen years older than when I went in!

In the meantime, I'm stuck here—nursemaid and babysitter for the last men on Earth!

THE END

Look Homeward, Spaceman

By CALVIN KNOX

Fine thing! When a man spends six long years away from his hearthside—roaming the far reaches of outer space—and then returns home to find that even his mother didn't know he'd gone beyond the front gate!

I GUESS this is the street, Paul thought. *I'm back.* It annoyed him that after six years in space he was no longer quite sure where his home was.

But this was the street, all right; the memories came flooding back. He remembered the houses of mottle-colored stone, the cracked and gnarled sidewalk, and the scraggly sycamore tree that marked his home. Not even the dawn of the space age had troubled the tree; it was still planted there firmly, leaning out at a crazy angle, with chunks of bark flaking off its side.

A pretty girl came around the corner. She was wearing softly - glowing translucent slacks, and with her was a big old Dalmatian at the end of a radioleash.

"Hi, Paul," she said, smiling.

"Hello," he said uncertainly.

He wondered how she knew him. She didn't look like much past seventeen, and so she could only have been eleven or so when he had gone away. Yet she recognized him at once.

He frowned and reached back into his memory. The Dalmatian might be the old

Reilly dog, he thought. And then the girl would be Nancy Reilly. He turned for another look at the girl's retreating figure, and chuckled. She had been just a scrawny kid playing jumprope when he left.

Paul approached his house, and noted with amusement that the old woman who lived next door was still rocking on her porch, looking placidly out at nothing particular.

"Hello, Paul," she said, as he came close. "Nice weather, isn't it?"

Shocked, he mumbled slowly, "It certainly is," and started up the steps. He didn't even remember her name—but she knew him! Something was crazy here. How had all his memories escaped him?

He mounted the familiar steps. One, two, three (slightly cracked), four, five (somewhat warped), six. The old doormat was still there.

He shuffled his feet on the doormat, as he had been taught to do long years before, and, straightening his hair, squaring his shoulders, clearing his throat, he rang the bell. He waited.

He heard the sound of someone coming to open the door. Would it be his mother or his brother? he wondered. Probably his brother Jim, he decided; Mother most likely

wasn't getting around too much any more. Once more he practiced the firm handshake he had been preparing for his brother. *I'll grab old Jim by the hand and squeeze till he yells.*

"Who's there?" called a masculine voice.

"Me. Paul. I've come back for a furlough."

Slowly the door opened.

Horrorstricken, Paul stared at the man who had opened the door, and the man inside calmly returned the glance. They stood there, frozen, looking at each other.

He was looking at himself.

Not quite himself, he decided, once the initial shock had worn off. It was a younger version of himself at the door, with narrower shoulders, a paler face (Paul was proud of his heavy space-tan). The livid white scar across Paul's forehead did not mark the brow of the other man. He was shorter, softer-looking.

"Who are you?" said the man inside the door. *His voice is gentler than mine,* Paul thought. He was still stunned, blankly uncomprehending. It was insane, unreal.

"I could ask you the same thing," he said tightly. He



He held his ground as the relentless horde advanced.

started to move inside the house, but the other Paul moved the door closed an inch or two with an imperceptible gesture.

"I'm Paul Robinson," Paul said. "I used to live here. I've been in space six years, but now I'm home. Suppose you tell me, now, what in hell's going on?"

"Pardon me," the other Paul said softly. "I'm Paul Robinson. And I've never been away at all. Now please go away before you disturb my mother."

"Your mother?" Paul gasped. "I don't know what kind of joke this is, but I've had enough of it. Get out of the way." He started to push his way past the other Paul into the house.

"Gently, kid," said a quiet voice from within. Paul stopped. This was a voice he did recognize. "Don't make a scene."

"Jim," he said. "Jim!" He turned, anxious to be near someone he knew. So far this innocent return to his home had held more terrors than his entire tour of space.

He rushed to greet his older brother, but Jim dodged around him and went to the other Paul. With a swift, sudden motion Jim touched his hand to the other Paul's back,

and the other Paul stiffened in mid-stride.

"A robot!" Paul said, astonished. "A robot copy of me!"

"Yes," said Jim, going to Paul for the first time. Paul looked at his older brother—the older brother he had grown up with, worshipped, fought with, finally left behind when the call to space came. He seized Jim's hand and shook hard.

Jim's grip wasn't what it had been. He winced and tried to struggle free, but Paul clamped tighter and tighter, glorying in his new strength.

"Uncle!" Jim cried. "Uncle!"

"At last," Paul said. He relaxed his grip and smiled broadly. "At long last I've made you yell Uncle, Jim."

Jim shrugged. "The younger generation always wins eventually, Paul. I'm afraid space has made a man out of you. How long are you going to be home?"

"I have a two-day leave," Paul said, staring strangely at the still-unexplained robot. "Then we ship out again on the Rigel run. The great wheel of interstellar commerce has decided it can dispense with this particular cog for two days."

Jim was no longer the powerful giant of Paul's memories. He had become stooped in six years, so he was no longer as tall as Paul, and his forehead was higher. And there was a loneliness in his eyes that hit Paul hard. Jim had wanted so badly to go to space—but they had, long before, decided that only one of them could go, so their mother wouldn't be left alone. Everyone thought it would be Jim to go—but Jim had waited for Paul to grow up so they could take the test together, and by then Jim's reflexes weren't what they had once been. Paul had easily outscored him.

Jim had stayed here, with his mother. Just the two of them in the old and dingy house, with the twentieth-century furniture and the old-style appliances and the ancient sycamore tree, while Paul had been to Deneb, Porcyon and the myriad other bright stars. He had thought of Jim occasionally, out in the stars, wondering how Jim was managing to fill in the lonely, empty circle of his days. The years had been hard on Jim.

"I'm having a friend drop in tomorrow for dinner before we go back to ship—Jack

Fenner, he's my bunkmate on ship. But say—" he turned to where the robot was standing frozen in the shadows, a word caught on its plastic lips. "Tell me what that thing is doing here. It was a nightmare to find *myself* answering the door."

Jim chuckled hollowly. "I bought him right after you left. It was pretty rough for a while, Paul: mother missed you terribly the first week. She became ill worrying about you."

"There was nothing about it in her letters," Paul said.

"Of course not. We'd never tell you. I wrote a lot of those letters myself. She was so sick that the doctors told me she wouldn't live unless you came back from space immediately. I didn't dare ask you to come back—I couldn't do that to my own brother—and so I had the robot double made. I told her that you were back, that your flight had been called off or something like that, and she accepted it."

"I borrowed, and I had a little put away. Back then I was thinking of marrying, and I'd saved for it. But it was my happiness against yours and Mother's, so I couldn't—you know, Paul. The girl married someone else. She's happy too."

"I see," Paul said. He sank into one of the deep, soft chairs and stared at the motionless replica of himself next to his brother. "So all these years she's thought I was right here. And that's why Nancy Reilly said hello to me and the old woman next door talked about the weather. What happens—"

"Jim!" someone called from upstairs. "Who was that at the door, Jim?"

"You'd better come down here, mother," Jim shouted. "I have a surprise for you!"

"What are you going to do?" Paul whispered. "Suppose she asks me something I don't know? Shouldn't we hide the robot?"

"No," Jim said. "This is the only way. I want her to see both of you together, so I can tell her the truth after all these years of pretending. She's well, now. She can take it."

"But what happens after I go back? Will she still be willing to accept the robot?"

"I know what I'm doing," Jim said. "Here she is."

Paul looked up as his mother appeared. "Hello, mother." He faced her, glad to see her again. She didn't look much older; she had hardly changed at all. "I'm home."

She looked at him—study-

ing the white scar on his forehead, he suspected—and then at the robot, then back at him, and finally at Jim.

"Who is this, Jim?" she asked. Her voice was as clear and as strong as it had ever been.

"This is Paul, mother. He's been in space for six years. I bought this robot right after he left, so you wouldn't miss him too much."

The shadows of the old house seemed to wrap around the three of them bleakly. "Is this true, Paul?" she said in a tight voice.

"Yes, mother." He walked around the room, getting familiar with the old things, with the smell of home and the warmth of home.

"You mean you've hoaxed me, Jim?" she demanded.

He nodded silently. "It was necessary."

The old woman considered that for a moment, and then started to laugh. "You did the right thing." She took Paul in her arms. "It's good to have you back, even if I've had you all along. You look wonderful—except—except for—"

"This?" He indicated the scar. "Got the Space Cross for that. Natives on Deneb—resisted our attempts to trade. We showed them."

"You were in a fight, Paul?"

"Yes, mother." It was as if he had been in a schoolboy tussle, not a struggle with aliens half a sky away.

As he stood there, the memory came flooding vividly back.

He was in the midst of a sweeping field of bright red vegetation, with sweat pouring off his back and making his uniform cling. The hot rays of Deneb came down.

He was standing alone, watching the wiry green men advance. His heart was pounding, but he was unafraid. It was his guard duty, and he was going to stand it. Behind him was the gleaming bulk of the great ship, and its sleeping crew.

The Denebians came closer.

"Get back," he cried roughly. They ignored him.

They were thin, humanoid men, with long, grotesque skulls and deepset, terrifying eyes. They came closer. He drew his gun and gestured with it.

Then suddenly one of them leaped, and Paul felt the nauseous alien smell near him, then around him. He jabbed upward with the gun, fired, and shoved. The corpse fell backward.

And then they were all around him, kicking, scratching, screaming furiously. Paul shouldered his way through them, took up his stand at the base of a towering *drulla*-tree, started firing into the gibbering horde. They dropped—but still kept coming.

Then the ammunition was gone, and more Denebians kept pouring from the forest. Laying about him viciously with his gunbutts, he crushed skulls and smashed alien faces with savage glee. They swarmed up and around him, and he felt a claw rip across his forehead. Blood streamed down into his eyes, and he was blind—but through the haze, he could see his crewmates coming, at last, to his rescue.

When it was over, he was a hero. And he hadn't been afraid—not half as afraid as he was back on Earth, in his own home, for no reason that he could discern. A sinister atmosphere hung over the house, and it worried him. He didn't like it. The situation made him uncomfortable.

He sat down on the staircase next to his mother, hooking one long leg over the other and pulling up his shiny Space Greys. "I have a two-day leave," he told her.

"Fine, Paul," she said quiet-

ly. "It's good to have you even for a little while."

He stood up and hugged her, gingerly, as if she were made of soap-bubbles.

"Come on. You must be hungry," she said, heading toward the kitchen. Jim followed, smiling, while the robot stayed frozen in its corner. "You know, Paul," she said, all these years I loved that machine like it was my own son. And I never knew the difference. Science is a wonderful thing, isn't it?"

Paul nodded uneasily. The substitute-idea was still too grotesque for him to take as lightly as she did.

"Where are you going when you ship out tomorrow?"

"Sirius first," he said. "By overdrive. Then to Procyon, and back to Deneb for a little cleanup action, then on to Rigel for a while." He glanced at Jim. Paul knew he was picturing those stars in his mind, seeing them by the light of his tarnished dreams. "Ought to be quite a brawl at Deneb," he said. "Oh—I'm having a bunkmate of mine here for dinner tomorrow night before we go back. He'll tell you about Deneb."

"Paul?" She was looking at him intently, nervously.

"Yes, mother?"

She paused for a moment

as if arranging her words. Then she said, "Paul, do you *have* to go back to space?"

"What?"

"I mean it, Paul. When you leave tomorrow, I'll have only the robot again. I'll know he's not real. Anyway he'll only be half of my son. I don't want the little boy always; I want the man who's been to space. Stay here with us. I'll fix up your room the way you used to have it. All your books, your records, the desk arranged the old way, even that luminous bedspread you liked. Six years in space ought to be enough."

Paul glared angrily at his brother. *Why did Jim have to tell her the truth? Why not keep up the pretense? Did Jim do it deliberately, just to see me squirm? Maybe after all these years of self-sacrifice he wants to get back at me.*

"I want you to give up space. I don't want a robot substitute any more; I want my son." Her clear blue eyes, still undimmed by age, were flecked with tears.

"You can't ask that of me," Paul said through tight lips. "It's my life out there—I can't give it up now and tie myself down on Earth. I've left Earth for good."

"Stay here for *me*, Paul."

He knotted his hands. "Not

even for you. It's not fair of you to ask me to give up everything just like that. Space is *everything* to me."

"You'll like it here, Paul. You'll forget space in a month." She was coaxing, wheedling, trying desperately to hold him back.

"I wish I hadn't come home at all," he said dully. He walked to the window. The sun was just beginning to drop in the sky, and the distant spaceport was painted a dull orange by the dying day. He looked at the silver-red ships with their noses pointed to the skies.

"Why do you want to tie me down? I don't want you to suffer, but—"

"I know," she said. "The same old story. You've always been selfish, Paul. You've let your brother make every sacrifice for you, and you've never really shown any gratitude. And you never wanted to obey me, either. My wishes meant nothing to you."

He looked from one figure to the other in anguish. Why were they torturing him? Why had this whole homecoming been such a nightmare?

"I can't let you do this to me," he snapped. He walked toward the door and quickly strode through, passing the

unconcerned robot, slamming the door hard.

He reached the porch, paused, and stared bitterly at the quiet small-town street, wondering why they were doing this to him.

It was harder to fight your mother than a whole world-full of green Denebians.

"If I had known this would happen, Paul—"

"Forget it, Jim."

"I didn't know—"

"Skip it, Jim." Paul stared coldly at his brother. "I know why you did it," he said after a moment. "You want me to stay here so you can go away somewhere, don't you? You're afraid to leave Mother alone with robot-sons, so you want to trap me into taking your place here. Well, no game. You've chosen your lot, and you've got it for keeps."

"That's not it at all," Jim said. "You don't understand. I don't want to leave home. I can't leave. I've bound myself hand and foot. I've lived here all my life; this house is like a shell to me by now. I'm thirty-five, Paul. I'm set in my ways now, and I can't break out. I can't tell you how much everything in this house means to me. Mother, the books, the furniture, even the robot, I can't tell you."

"Okay, skip it," Paul said roughly. "Let's eat."

Mrs. Robinson had made a lavish breakfast, all the things she remembered Paul loved, but they ate in stony silence. Paul kept his eyes on his plate and she brought him the food without saying anything. After the meal was over he quietly picked up the dishes and put them in the washer, and sat down again.

Abruptly he got up and went to his old room. He wandered around in it, getting acquainted again with the things he had loved years before, playing one of his favorite records, sitting in his favorite chair. Then he came back down.

She was putting around, dusting and cleaning, while Jim sat quietly in a corner.

"Why don't you have an electronic duster?" he asked.

"This gives me something to do when I'm bored," she said, continuing to wipe. "What time is your bunkmate getting here?"

"Fenner? Oh, I don't know. He was in Wilmette visiting his family, and he'll probably get through here pretty soon. Blastoff is tomorrow morning at 8, but we have to be on board ship tonight, at 22 sharp."

"That means you'll have to

leave here about half-past-twenty to get to the spaceport on time," she said. She continued dusting for a while. When she considered the job finished, she put the dustcloth away.

"My room looked wonderful," Paul said. "Just the way it always did."

"I thought you'd like it," she said. "Sleep well?"

"The best. Nothing like sleeping at home after six years of spaceship cots."

"No," she said. "Nothing like it."

They were silent. The doorbell finally ended the silence when it had grown almost too tight to bear. Paul opened the door and Jack Fenner burst through.

He was a short, wiry man, smiling broadly, with thin space-tanned features and a keen-pointed nose. He wore a pair of rumpled Space Greys.

"You must be Mrs. Robinson," he said. "Gunner's always talking about you."

"Gunner?"

"Didn't he tell you? That's what we nicknamed him after the Deneb business."

"He didn't tell us much about Deneb," Jim said.

Fenner glanced at Jim. "Oh, hello. You must be Gunner's brother Jim. The one

who taught him how to use a gun."

"That's right," Jim said proudly. Paul frowned.

"You mean he didn't tell you about Deneb?" Fenner said in amazement. "First man in our ship to win a Space Cross and he didn't tell you? Why, when those Denebians came at us he held them off single-handed with two handguns until his ammo ran out, and then he used the guns as clubs till we got out to help him."

"You didn't tell me, Paul," said Mrs. Robinson accusingly.

"I didn't want to upset you."

"You mean you didn't know your son was a hero? Hell, Gunner, you weren't so modest on ship. Every time we—"

"Jack—" Paul protested.

"But you told that story from one end of space to the other—and I don't think you ever took that medal off. I'll bet you took showers with it pinned to your skin, you were so proud of it."

"So you're a hero, Paul? You didn't say much about it."

Paul deliberately ignored Jim's question and turned to Fenner. "How's your family, Jack?"

"Well, there's not very

much of it, you know. Just my aunt and my kid brother. But my brother just passed his Number One and he'll be shipping out for Centauri next month, and my aunt's going to be all alone. It's rough when you have someone in space like that, and you're all alone at home, like my aunt. Except for her cats, that is. She's got two big Persians and they're going to be like children for her now that my brother's leaving. Say, Mrs. Robinson, why don't you ring up my aunt and get together sometime? I think you'll like her."

Hastily he scribbled something on a slip of paper. "Here's her number. Mrs. Grace Fenner, over in Wilmette. Call her up sometime. She loves having guests, and she'll love having Gunner's mother especially."

"Thank you, Jack," Mrs. Robinson said. She took the slip of paper. "I'll get in touch with her. But you must be awfully hungry, Jack. Let's have dinner now and talk later."

"Fine," Fenner said. "I've been hearing about your cooking all the way from Deneb back." He followed her into the kitchen, and Paul and his brother walked in together. Jim gave Paul a light tap on

the shoulder as they entered, almost playful, almost as if it were years ago.

After the meal, with the sun well below the horizon, Fenner stood up, stretched contentedly, and said, "I hate to rush off like this, but I have one more stop before I get back to the ship. Thanks for everything, Mrs. Robinson. I sure intend to take you up on that repeat invitation next time we're down Earth. So long, Jim." He turned to Paul. "Guess I'll be seeing you at 22 aboard ship, Gunner. See you then."

"No, you won't," Paul said slowly.

"What?" Fenner whirled in a m a z e m e n t. "You're not transferring, are you?"

"No. I'm pensioning out. I've decided to stay here at home. I've had my fling in space," he said deliberately, "and now I'm going to settle down."

"You're kidding," Fenner said in a hushed voice.

Mrs. Robinson stared at Paul. "You're not going back."

"No."

"Yes," said Jim, almost in the same moment. "It's all a little joke. Paul just wanted to see what your reaction would be. He told me about this before. He's going." He

kicked Paul in the leg surreptitiously, hard, and Paul barely managed to conceal a wince. He flicked a glance at Jim. Jim was shaking his head in a way Paul understood.

"Just a little joke," Paul said thinly. "Of course I'm going back." *But I'm willing to stay*, he thought.

"Of course you're going back," said his mother. "Heroes never quit, do they? You'll have to finish the job on Deneb, and then stop by here for another couple of meals. I'll be waiting." She laughed, and Fenner was caught up by the laughter and started to chuckle.

"You'd better start packing your things," she said. "You wouldn't want to be late for blastoff." An undercurrent of mirth seemed to ripple from her, and finally Paul broke his grim mask and smiled in relief. He felt as if a weight had been lifted.

Sunup came and the ships in the far-off spaceport gleamed bright against the cloudless blue sky. Mrs. Robinson stared through the open window, squinting a little because the spaceport was so far away and hard to see in the morning light. She watched carefully, and, as the hand

of the clock reached eight, one of the ships slowly began to rise, stood for a moment on a tail of fire, and shot up out of sight.

She turned. Jim was standing behind her. She looked past him at the empty apartment, at Paul's deserted room with the pajamas lying crumpled on the bed.

"Our little game is over," she said. "I'm glad."

"I'm glad too," Jim said. "It was interesting, watching him react. His face dropped a mile when his double answered the door. But he's not the same old selfish Paul anymore. He's grown up. I thought he was at first, but he meant it when he said he was quitting. He had me worried for a minute; suppose he had kept to it and actually stayed here? With us?" He winced at the thought.

"It would have complicated things terribly," she said. "It would have destroyed our nice routine completely. Well, suppose we go downstairs and get the poor robot working again. He'll be awfully stiff after two days of being shut off."

They went downstairs, mother and son, and Jim took out the key and activated the Paul-robot. The robot finished

the word he had to say, and stretched his limbs.

"The family is complete again," Jim said.

"It's good to be moving," said the Paul-robot.

Mrs. Robinson turned to her son. "You'd better renew my charge too, Jim," she said. "I'll be running down any day now."

He opened the panel in her back and touched the key to the charging-stud.

"There. Enough energy to keep you going for weeks, mother." He put his arms around his mother and his brother. "Now we can get back into our regular family routine again, until the next time Paul has a furlough. Then we can play the game again."

He looked at the Paul-robot and the mother-robot, and at the cozy four walls that bounded his little world. It was good to have the mother and brother and the home he loved, all the rest of his life. He smiled warmly, and thought of poor Paul fighting for his life on those hot, uncomfortable planets.

He drew them closer to him. "I can't tell you how much you mean to me," he said. "Both of you." His voice was heavy with emotion.

THE END

CALLING CAPTAIN FLINT

By RICHARD GREER

An alien life form with all the arts of makeup and camouflage at its command, is required to walk among human beings and not be suspected. A tough problem. What manner of impersonation should the alien attempt? Why, the obvious one, of course.

IN THE communications room of the Interstellar Police Cruiser *Skyfire*, a thin sheet of pale green plastic slid out of the lightwriter. Lieutenant Summers waited until the message was finished, then ripped the sheet out of the reproducer.

He raised an eyebrow as he read the communication. "Trouble on Delgon III, eh?" he muttered to himself. "Looks like a rough time will be had by all." He reached over and punched a button on the intercom panel. "Captain Flint? Orders from Main Base just came in."

"Send them up," said the voice at the other end.

Summers dropped the sheet of plastic into a slot marked "Captain's Quarters," and it vanished. Less than a minute

later, orders were crackling over the communication lines in the great vessel. The *Skyfire* had been merely cruising along on a routine flight through the vast, starry reaches of the Galaxy, but now it changed its direction of flight, and the mighty super-atomic engines of the great battle cruiser hurled it through space at the highest velocity they could obtain.

Light-year after light-year of space were eaten up as the ship drove toward a star called Delgon—or, more precisely, toward the third planet of that sun, Delgon III.

At a broad table somewhere in the fortress-capitol of the world of Delgon III, sat a man. There were other men around him, but to even the



The ray seared through flesh and bone.

most casual observer, there was something so different about this one man that he overshadowed the others as a skyscraper overshadows a puppet. He had a hard, broad jaw, iron-gray hair, and a heavy, muscular body. He smiled coldly at the others, and behind his jet-black eyes there glittered something malignantly evil.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the so-called 'underground' tried to send a message from here to the Interstellar Police. We don't know whether or not it got through, but we must take no chances. Have you any suggestions?" He looked around the room, finally allowing his eyes directly to come to rest on one man. "Admiral Gorvos?"

"Our defenses are more than adequate for any Police ship, sir," he said. His voice was almost sneering. "Their puny armaments are not now, nor will they ever be, a match for ours."

"You, Admiral, are a fool," said the other. "At this point in the game, overconfidence is our greatest enemy. As long as the Interstellar Police know nothing of our operations, we are relatively safe. But if—and when—that call is answered, we must be prepared to wipe out that ship before a

call for help can be sent to their Main Base."

"Sir, no single ship could outmaneuver our defenses," the Admiral said stubbornly. "We have detector screens in multiple layers, covering every volume of space for three light years away. We have a screen of a thousand battleships covering that volume of space. No object bigger than a basketball could approach us without being discovered, and, once discovered, it will be annihilated."

"I hope, for your own sake, you are right," the leader said. His cold eyes moved a bit, to the next man. "Derwyn, you were supposed to have stamped all opposition out, yet there remained enough of a nucleus to enable them to build and operate a sub-space radio and call the Interstellar Police. What have you to say?"

Derwyn's face was white, but his voice was even. "As soon as the radio began to operate, my men smashed into their hideout, destroyed the radio, and captured those rebels who were not killed outright. We were there within fifteen seconds after the instrument was turned on."

"There was time for them to make the call," said the leader. "And your job was to

prevent such things, not to stop them after it's too late."

"Perhaps the call didn't get through," Derwyn said.

"So? Another's failure does not atone for your own." He had been holding one hand beneath the edge of the table. Now he lifted it, and it came up holding a Kedwin 50 blaster. His finger touched the activator, and the subordinate crumpled to the floor as the ravening energy beam tore through his head.

"Remove it," the leader signalled. "Baltek, I trust you can do a better job with the Secret Police than your former superior."

As the guards dragged away the body, the man addressed as Baltek nodded. "I have already taken steps to nail down those rebels who are left," he said, glancing once at his dead superior with callous indifference.

"Excellent," said the leader. "Then let us proceed. There are other things to attend to."

He looked at all of them, one by one. "We must deal, somehow, with Jaim Umek, the former President. He is still alive, and he has sworn to kill himself if he's ever captured. We must decide on a way to capture him alive; in his mind are certain valuable

secrets that we *must* have. Are there any suggestions?"

Baltek smiled craftily. "I think I may have one, sir."

Six months later, an old man sat in his apartment, looking at the three people that were seated in various chairs around the room. He sighed, and felt, somehow, very old indeed. Jaim Umek, at seventy, did not feel at all like leading a subtle revolt that might at any time break into violence.

He surveyed the others carefully. Smed Hober, a barrel-chested, heavy-bearded, heavy-set man, whose rough manner concealed an intelligent brain; Bety Cardill, a girl in her middle twenties, with closely-cropped red hair and wide-set green eyes; and Jay Denner, tall, blond, handsome, and much too young. He didn't look a day over eighteen.

A girl, a boy, and an old man. Only Smed Hober was really the type for this kind of work. But, Jaim Umek thought to himself, it was work that had to be done—by whoever was available to do it.

"It has been six months," he said, in his soft, old voice. "Six months since we contacted the Police. And nothing has come of it. None of you were with

me at that time; the original group was wiped out—except for myself. I am small, and I was able to hide. But the others were killed, some right on the spot, others later, in prison.

"Since then, my men have been killed, one by one, here and there, until there are only the four of us left. And still the Police do not come."

Smed Hober snorted, and his deep voice came rumbling out of his chest. "How the hell do you know you even contacted them?"

Umek smiled faintly. "I may as well tell you. We got an answer from the Main Base of the Interstellar Police. They said they were sending one ship: the *Skyfire*, commanded by Captain Jason Flint."

Bety Cardill's green eyes narrowed. "One ship? How did they ever expect to get through the defenses around this planet? Admiral Gervos has enough power out there to smash any single ship."

"True, my dear," said Umek sadly. "You see, the Police had no notion that this was as important as it is. They didn't know how closely guarded and viciously defended Delgon III is. The *Skyfire* was probably blasted out of space months ago."

Jay Denner ran a muscular hand over his blond hair. "Then we can't expect help from that quarter. What do we do? Give up?"

Jaim Umek's gray eyes looked steadily into Denner's blue ones. "Give up? *No!* No, young man, we most emphatically do not! Leader Mordegg and his crew of cut-throats are planning the biggest interstellar war this Galaxy has ever seen. If it is not nipped in the bud now, millions—nay, *billions*—of innocent people will die.

"No, we must not give up; we must somehow get word to the Interstellar Police again. And this time, we must tell them to send a fleet, not just a single cruiser."

"How do you propose to do that, Umek?" Hober said, in a deep bass voice. "It takes expensive equipment to build a subspace radio, and Leader Mordegg has seen to it that all sources of supply have been cut off. Frankly, I don't think we can build another radio, and, even if we did, we'd be spotted before we could get a message out. This new Secret Police Chief, Baltek, is no fool; he's been wiping out our men wholesale these last six months."

"True," nodded Jaim Umek slowly. "If it were not for the

spy ray block around this room he would probably even now be watching us. Except for us four, Mordegg and Baltek control the whole planet.

"But, nonetheless, I have a plan."

"Let's hear it," said Bety.

Umek shook his head. "Not now. We must proceed slowly. You see, I happen to have one bit of vital information that Mordegg does not have. I have reason to believe that Captain Jason Flint, alone of all his crew, survived the wrecking of the *Skyfire* and is, at this moment, somewhere in Delgon City!"

Leader Mordegg pressed a switch on the visiphone at his desk, and the screen lit up to reveal the features of a hard-faced young man.

"Baltek, how about Jaim Umek?"

Baltek smiled sardonically. "We are slowly driving him to desperate measures, sir. One by one, we have bottled him up and picked off his colleagues. And now, sir, we are ready. We have set a trap for him that can't fail. We will have him within our suppressor fields so that the bomb he carries in that hollow tooth can't go off. It will be simple to nab him then."

Mordegg's black eyes glittered. "Excellent! I'll let you attend to the whole thing, then."

Baltek nodded. "I won't fail; I have a spy planted in his organization who is bringing me information about Umek regularly. Unless he actually contacts a Police officer, we're perfectly safe."

Mordegg smiled unpleasantly. "Just bear in mind that if he *does* contact the Police, I'll need a new Secret Police Chief."

"Don't worry, sir," said Baltek calmly. "I have no intentions of going the way of my predecessor."

"Spoken like a true Videllian," said Mordegg. He cut off the visiphone.

"The time has come for our final stroke," Umek said, "It's an all-or-nothing job." His voice sounded tight in his throat.

The four of them were sitting in an armored ground car less than a mile from the fortress within which Leader Mordegg and his men pulled the strings that ran a world.

"I don't like it," said Smed Hober gruffly. "You drag us out here in the middle of the night without telling us what's going on and expect us to fall in with whatever it is that you have in mind. Why?"

"Why?" the old man smiled in the gloom that surrounded the parked car. "Because I fear a leak. If none of you knows what we're going to do, then none of you can tell anyone else."

Jay Denner narrowed his blue eyes. "You're insinuating that one of us is a traitor?"

"I don't know," Umek confessed. "I am simply making sure that there is no leak. Frankly, I do not suspect anyone of you three; if I did, I wouldn't have you with me on this mission. But, if one of you is, we'll be ready to pull this off before the guilty one can do anything about it."

Bety Cardill smoked a cigarette and said nothing, but her green eyes were watching the others closely.

"What's the pitch?" asked Smed Hober.

The old man put the tips of his fingers together. "I've found that Mordegg intends to strike a blow at the Sivarn worlds within a week. He has already partially undermined their government. No warning will get to the Interstellar Police in time. *We must get word to Main Base!*"

"How?" asked Denner.

Umek looked at the tall, blond giant. "You're a young man, Jay, but you've shown that you have guts. You'll

need every bit of them in this."

"Quit beating around the bush, Umek," Hober growled.

"Very well. We're going to invade the Grand Palace itself! There is *one* subradio we can use—the only one on the planet!"

"Are you *nuts*, Umek?" Hober's voice was a bellow. "The four of us? We'd never make it!"

Umek smiled. "Would you say we could make it if Captain Jason Flint went with us? An officer of the Interstellar Police?"

Hober frowned and said nothing.

"Remember the training those officers get. The Police don't start with young men; they start with children. From the time they are five years of age, they are trained, physically and mentally, to be the finest specimens of humanity in the Galaxy. They can outwit, outfight, and if necessary, outrun anything on two legs.

"And, too, they've got defense mechanisms that very few people even realize exist."

Jay Denner nodded. "We know all this. Is this Captain Flint going with us, then? Five of us are going to sneak into that fortress?"

"Only four," said Bety Cardill, speaking for the first

time. "You see, gentlemen, I am Captain Jason Flint."

"A woman?" said Hober. "I don't believe it!" He jerked his head around and glared at Jaim Umek. "You really *are* crazy, Umek! How do you know this girl is Flint?" He looked at her again and then at Jay Denner. "I suddenly realize that none of us really knows each other. I'm not going anywhere with any of you!" He started to reach for the door handle.

"Stop!" A blaster had appeared suddenly in Umek's hand. "You're going nowhere, Hober."

The big man's eyes blazed, but he said nothing.

"Just how are we going to get into the fortress?" Jay Denner interrupted calmly. "Have you any ideas, Captain Flint?"

The girl smiled. "I know what you're thinking. The castle is guarded by detector fields; they'd spot us on their screens before we got within a hundred yards of the place." She reached into a briefcase she was holding and pulled out four belts, each of which had a small box connected to it. "These are field neutralizers," she said. "When we wear these, we're invisible, as far as the detectors are concerned. Of course, human beings could

see us, but the guards rely on their detectors; they don't keep a visual watch."

Umek looked at Smed Hober. "Would anyone but a Police officer have devices like that?"

Hober had lost his truculence. "I guess not," he said slowly. "All right, I'm with you. Let's go."

Between the great fortress and the nearby city lay a swath of burned ground. It was half a mile wide, and within that strip, nothing moved, nothing lived; it had been burned to sterility by the heavy ray projectors on the walls of the fortress. Any human being, any animal, any moving thing that came within that area instantly set off the detector alarms, and the projectors fired automatically.

As the little group reached the edge of the area, Smed Hober stopped. He looked at the girl. "After you, Captain Flint," he said with heavy significance.

The girl smiled. "You don't think the neutralizers will work?" She shrugged and strode on toward the fortress, across the burned and blackened ground. One by one, the others followed, with Jay Denner following in the rear.

The group walked stealthily

across half a mile of cinders and slag until they came at last to the wall of the fortress.

"How do we get in?" Hober asked.

"This way," old Umek whispered. "There's a secret entrance near here that I don't think Mordegg knows about."

They crept along the wall for several yards until Umek finally held up his hand. "Here we are. Pray that it works." He felt with his fingers against the refractalloy wall. There was a subdued click, and a section slid open, revealing an oblong of blackness.

"Inside, quickly," Umek said.

The four went in, and the old man closed the door behind them. The lights came on automatically.

And, in that instant, Smed Hober drew his blaster and fired. The girl didn't even have time to scream before she dropped to the floor, her midsection burned away by the searing beam.

The IPS *Skyfire* hung, invisible and undetectable, above the capitol of Delgon III. Her second-in-command, Lieutenant Blord Mayne, watched the precision chronometer on the wall. "If all goes well, we'll be ready to drop in ten minutes. If it doesn't—"

Ensign Derth shrugged. "If the defenses of the fortress don't go down, we'll have to blast our way in. But I'm not worried. Captain Flint hasn't missed yet."

Mayne looked at him. "Son, never take anything for granted, not even Captain Flint. Is everything else according to plan ready?"

Derth checked the screen. "Yes, sir. The Delgonian forces have no idea how easily we penetrated their screen. If we can take the fortress, the fleet can smash the Delgonians easily."

"All right," Mayne said. "Meantime, let's hope Flint gets through."

In the same instant that the girl dropped, Jaim Umek, moving surprisingly fast for a man of his age, leveled his blaster at Smed Hober and fired.

"So *you're* the spy!" he snarled between clenched teeth.

But, to the old man's amazement, the energy beam was stopped a full inch away from Hober's body. It splashed harmlessly off a hard-held body screen.

"I'm not your spy," the barrel-chested man said calmly. He reholstered his weapon and pointed at the girl. "Peel that

face-mask off and see for yourself."

With a look of astonishment and fear on his face, the old man knelt and felt under the girl's chin. The flesh mask that was her face peeled off easily. The face beneath it was not even remotely human. Dead green eyes glared up in hate from a purple-scaled, skull-like countenance.

"I—I don't understand," said Umek weakly. "How—when did you know? What is this *thing*?"

Hober looked down at the corpse. "That's a Videllian. So, I think, is Leader Mordegg and some of his staff. Perhaps all of them. You see, for some reason, the Videllians hate the human race with an unholy hatred. Our conquering of the Galaxy has made them insanely jealous." Then the big man smiled gently. "As for how I knew—I knew when she said she was Captain Flint."

"Then you are—?" Umek's eyes were wide.

"Captain Jason Flint at your service," came the reply. "Now let's go. We've got to cut off the defenses in this fortress within ten minutes. The *Skyfire* is a few miles above us, waiting to smash in here as soon as the screens go dead. And we'll have to move

fast; Mordegg and his men know we're in here."

"How do they know?" Umek asked. "They'd have killed us by now, if they did!"

As they moved on down the corridor, blasters in hand, the big man jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "You don't think that Videllian really had field neutralizers, do you?" He tapped the box at his belt. "These things are phonies. The Videllians wanted two things. They want you—alive, and they wanted to know if there was any way in here that they didn't know of. They knew that you, as a politician of the old Government, would know about any such thing. I took a chance with the Videllian. There were other ways that I could have gotten us in here, but if they were going to let us in, I figured I might as well take advantage of it. Now, let's move a little faster. Mordegg will know by now that we've killed the 'girl'. She had a detector activator on her, and they know that's not moving."

"Good God!" It was Jay Denner. The blond young man was jerking off his belt. "These phony field nullifiers! They probably have tracers in them! Quick!"

He flung the belt down the corridor, back the way they

had come. Quickly, Umek and the big man did the same.

"If they don't know where this corridor is," Denner went on, "they won't know where we'll come out. Quick, Umek, which way to the defense controls?"

"You—you mean we don't need to send for the IP ships?" So much had happened in the last few minutes that the old man was lost.

"Of course not," said the barrel-chested man in his deep baritone voice. "The entire fleet is out there, waiting for us to cut the defenses. Let's go."

"This way," said Umek.

Leader Mordegg smiled grimly to himself as he watched the motions of the three figures on the spy ray screen.

"The fools," he said softly. "Human beings are so stupid! It's a wonder to me that they ever managed to get off their stinking little planet, much less overrun the Galaxy like the vermin they are."

Baltek stepped up beside him. "So there were no other secret corridors in this castle except for the one we found, eh?"

Mordegg shook his head. "Not unless that old fool, Umek knows of others. I pre-

sume our men are waiting for them in the control room? That seems to be where they're headed."

Baltek smiled nastily. "They'll get a hot reception, sir. I've got three semi-portable projectors in there. That Captain Flint's body screen may be able to stop a hand weapon, but it won't stop a big gun. Denner and Umek will be taken alive."

"I wish we could have heard what they said after they left Gishla's body," Mordegg mused. "I'm surprised to find that this Flint is really alive. That was Gishla's mistake; she thought she could claim to be this Flint and get away with it. For such stupidity, she deserved to die."

"Perhaps we should have put sound pickups in the other three belts, too," Baltek mused.

The Leader shrugged. "It would have done no good. They threw them away."

"It is rather amusing to watch them," Baltek said.

At the door that opened into the control room, Umek paused. "This is the door, Captain Flint. There will undoubtedly be someone in there."

"I'll take care of that," the big man said. "Stand back;

someone may fire, and you have no screens."

He eased open the door.

And was immediately caught in the chest by the hot, powerful beam of a semi-portable ray projector. Fortunately, the ray screen around him held—for a time, at least.

He spotted the control banks for the automatic defenses of the great fortress and sprinted toward them. As he ran, another of the semi-portables blazed hot energy at his running body. Strong as it was, the little generator for the ray screen on his body couldn't take that much energy. Rapidly, it glowed red, then orange, and finally collapsed in a glare of blue-violet. At the same time, the third ray projector cut in. The clothing on the running figure dissolved instantly in the coruscating fire, but by that time, he had reached the control panel.

The body in the blaze of blue-white flame exploded violently, smashing the defense controls into a smouldering ruin.

Instantly, the lights went out, and the atomic-powered ray screen that had protected the great fortress died. The huge, permanent beam projectors on the walls and roof were useless.

"This way!" shouted Jay Denner as he grabbed the old man's hand and sprinted down the corridor. After the first blinding flare of the ray guns, they had not stopped to see more. When the explosion rocked the control room, they were many yards away, running down the suddenly darkened passageway.

Denner pulled out a flashlight without stopping. The beam gleamed ahead of them.

Jaim Umek was gasping for breath. Spry as he was, his age was beginning to tell on him. "I—I can't—go on!" he gasped. As he stumbled, the blond giant grabbed him with one brawny arm and threw him over one broad shoulder.

"We've got to get out of here," he said. "That spaceship is going to hit the fortress at any moment!"

At last the beam of the flashlight struck the burned corpse of the Videllian. Beyond it was the door that led to the outside. Denner pushed it aside and ran out and across the burned, cindery ground that stretched between them and the city beyond.

Not even then did he stop running. His long, powerful legs moved like tireless machines. He did not stop until they were back at the armored car that belonged to Jaim

Umek. Denner put the unconscious old man in the seat and turned to watch the fireworks.

As soon as the defenses were down, the *Skyfire* sent a signal to the IP fleet that waited just beyond the range of the Delgonian detectors. Instantly, the fleet moved in.

In the flagship of the Delgonian forces, Admiral Gervos saw the first sign on the detectors and sneered. "At last, after six months of waiting, the fool Police ship actually shows up. Blast it!"

But the Police guns blazed first, backed by the stupendous power of IP superatomic generators. Another, and yet another ship speared in from space, firing those unbearably hot beams. The screens of the Delgonian ships couldn't stand up against power like that; they flared into the ultra-violet and collapsed. When the ravening beams of force touched the metal hulls of the ships, the metal became white hot, melted and boiled. Not even solid refractalloy can stand up to beams projected from the energies of the Police superatomic generators.

Some of the Delgonians tried to flee, but the flashing swiftness of the great Police cruisers was more than a match for them. Ship after

ship went down before those blazing projectors.

And it was not until nearly half the fleet had been vaporized and bombed that the remaining vessels signalled that they would surrender to the Police.

Meanwhile, the *Skyfire* was dropping toward the vast fortress beneath it. She could not use her main blasters, as the rest of the fleet was doing, for the searing energy splashing from the refractalloy walls would destroy the nearby city, which Lieutenant Mayne had no desire to do. Instead, he used the needle beams, cutting the heavy dome into great chunks with the slashing rays.

The huge cruiser settled to the ground between the city and the fortress, playing her beams against the metal walls. Under cover of the searing rays, armed and armored Policemen poured from the airlocks of the *Skyfire* and ran toward the breaches in the walls. The ray screens they wore were not the small, easily-concealable type that would only stop a handgun, but heavy generators that could project a screen strong enough to stop the concentrated fire of a semi-portable easily.

Not until all action had ceased did Jay Denner climb

into the car and start the engine.

Jaim Umek opened his eyes. A man dressed in white was bending over him.

"Just relax, Mr. Umek; I'm a Police doctor. You're all right; it's just that, at your age, you shouldn't exert yourself so much." He smiled. "There's someone here who wants to see you."

Jay Denner stepped through the door of the room. *Denner was wearing the uniform of a Police Captain!*

Umek gasped. "Who—?"

"I'm sorry we had to play such a trick on you, but believe me, it was necessary. Yes; I *really am* Captain Jason Flint."

"What about Hober?"

"You see, we couldn't attack the fortress unless we could break her defenses first. If we had, everyone in Delgon City might have died from the radiation that would have splashed from the ray screens. We had no desire to kill human beings; we merely wanted to get the Videllians.

"We could get by their detectors easily enough, but a field nullifier is much too small to be carried by a human being, so we had to figure out some way to get a man in past the defenses of

the fort. The Videllians wanted you, and they wanted you alive. And you had sworn to kill yourself if they ever got you. So they decided, at last, to set the trap which 'Bety' suggested after convincing you she was Captain Flint."

"But what about Hober?"

"What you saw was nothing but a robot, controlled from my ship. That barrel chest on the robot concealed a bomb; we knew it wouldn't be easy to shut off the controls; they'd be guarded. The robot had to be used; we couldn't conceal a ray screen big enough to stand up against those projectors. That's why we let 'Bety' get us past the defenses.

"There was another reason, too. Before they died, the Videllians sent a message to their home world saying that they had killed Captain Flint. There are many purposes in that, which we won't go into here."

"But *you*, Captain Flint," Umek said. "You look so young!"

Flint grinned. "It's one of my failings, but it's a help sometimes." He patted the old man on the shoulder. "You rest. Tomorrow, you've got to become head of the new government of Delgon III."

THE END

CORN-FED GENIUS

By E. K. JARVIS

F. DANFORTH GRAHAM sat behind a great mahogany desk in an office panelled with mahogany picwood and methodically stuffed expensive tobacco into the mahogany-colored bowl of a flamegrain briar pipe. He fired up a pipe lighter that looked and behaved like a miniature blowtorch and puffed the tobacco into glowing coals. Then he looked again at the man on the other side of the desk, seeing him through a blue-gray wreath of smoke.

"Do you really consider that a business proposition, Mr. Thorne?" he asked at last.

Peter Thorne was a tall, muscular, taciturn man in his middle thirties. His crew-cut hair was premature salt-and-pepper gray, and his hazel eyes looked out of deep sock-

Thorne brought his new machine to the great industrialist, and everything was fine except nobody could make it work. The answer went beyond mechanics—back into basics—back to an ancient quotation beginning—"Oh, ye of little faith. . . . I"

ets beneath a pronounced supraorbital ridge. He had a habit of rubbing his chin and lower lip with his right forefinger as he spoke.

"I don't see anything wrong with it, Mr. Graham," he said. "I've got to protect my invention."

Graham raised one bushy, white eyebrow and smoothed the palm of his hand over his pink, hairless scalp. For a full minute, he said nothing, but there was a look of deep thought in his shrewd blue eyes.

Finally: "Now let's get this straight. Essentially, you say you've designed a new, high-temperature rocket exhaust nozzle liner. You want General Alloys to test your sample to see if it works as you claim it does. You're willing to put



The machine snarled—then purred with contentment.

up a five-thousand-dollar bond to guarantee it will be worth our time to run the test. After that, we'll dicker. Is that it?"

"That's it, sir," said Thorne. "You see, I wouldn't want anyone to steal my invention. That wouldn't be fair to me."

"Steal it?" Graham's other eyebrow went up. "Haven't you patented it?"

Thorne blinked. "No, sir. I understand you have to prove that something is new and useful in order to patent it, don't you? Well, I can't prove it's useful until it's been tested, can I? And, you see, I don't have any way of testing it in my own little shop."

Graham's eyes grew very thoughtful. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Thorne; I'll check with the lab and get an estimate on what it will cost to test this liner of yours. We'll draw up a contract which calls for either payment, at a proper rate, for laboratory service, or an option on your patent, depending on the results of the tests, if you see what I mean."

Thorne nodded. "If it doesn't work out, I pay. If it does, you get an option on the patent. And you'll pay the patent fees—lawyers and so forth?"

"Naturally," said Graham. "If your invention is worth

anything, if it's patentable, we'll see that you get full protection." He looked at his wristwatch. "What say you come back tomorrow at one? We'll have the papers drawn up then; you can have your attorney look them over."

Thorne rose and extended his hand. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Graham," he said, smiling—a little bashfully, Graham thought. "My friends in Peoria said I'd never be able to talk to an important man like you, but I told 'em that a good businessman is always open to a good business proposition. And I was right."

Graham's smile was friendly. "Of course, Mr. Thorne. We'll see you tomorrow, then? Good."

When the door had closed behind Peter Thorne, Graham reached for the phone.

"Give me Dahlquist, in the testing labs." "Dr. Dahlquist? This is Graham. Can you give me a breakdown of what it costs to test one of those rocket tube liners? What? No, just a regular run. Have Cost and Accounting do a run on it, will you? Fine."

"By the way, any new leads on those liners? Mmmhmm. All right. Good-bye. Thanks." He hung up and shrugged.

F. Danforth Graham knew

nothing whatever about metal alloys, but he knew how to handle the money end. The stockholders of General Alloys knew it; in the past ten years, Graham, as President of General Alloys had more than tripled the value of GA stocks, both preferred and common.

Now he was after big money—a Government contract for the newly-born Space Service. Already, the new, ultra-hard, tough, and light titanium-manganese-hydrogen alloys had put GA well into the running for hull construction of space vessels. There was only one fly in the ointment as far as General Alloys was concerned. It doesn't do much good to build spaceship hulls if you can't propel them.

People—the Great General Public—had been inured to $e = Mc^2$ for twenty-odd years, ever since the first A-bomb had gone off, back in '45. Most of them, however, were totally unaware of that famous formula's little brother, $e = Mv^2$. The kinetic energy of a moving body is proportional to its mass multiplied by the square of its velocity.

As far as the rocket is concerned, this simply means that the hotter the exhaust

gases, the less reaction mass the ship has to carry.

Working on this sound principle, the AEC and the USAF had come up with the highly efficient, but totally useless Rhodeland-Clevebush Drive, an atomic reactor which squirted water out the tail end of a rocket at something like six thousand degrees Centigrade—a nice, brilliant, white heat.

Why useless? Well, you've got to have something to make the rocket tube out of, and, unfortunately, nothing, but nothing, will stand up to heat like that for very long.

The ceramics boys had been working on it for a long time, but F. Danforth Graham felt that there ought to be something General Alloys could produce that would do the job. So far, the experimental labs had come up with absolutely nothing.

Graham sat in his office and scratched his bushy brows. No good businessman pays any attention to cranks, but this was an unusual case. One: The man was willing to pay. Two: It might—just might—be something. Three: If it *was* useful, it looked as though GA might get it for a song. And, in the fourth place, GA could make money in the first place.

Two weeks later, to the day, Peter Thorne was back in the sumptuous office of the president of General Alloys. He sat down in the chair in front of the desk and politely refused Graham's offer of a cigarette.

"Cigar, perhaps?" Graham opened a box of fine Panatelas.

Thorne smiled a little and shook his head. "I don't smoke," he said.

Graham began stuffing the flamegrain briar. "I'm a pipe man, myself," he explained. "The other stuff is for visitors." He lit the pipe with his miniature blowtorch and leaned back in his chair. He tapped a sheaf of papers on his desk with a neatly manicured forefinger. "I've read these reports on the test of your tube liner. I'm not a scientist, but they look good to me, and they evidently look good to the lab men. You watched the tests; what did you think?"

"I think they ran very well, sir. They took an oxyacetylene flame at forty-four hundred Centigrade without losing a microgram after twelve hours. That's pretty good."

Graham glanced at the report. "Yes. According to this, the lab men are flabbergasted. They took some turnings from that liner. Seems it's cast tungsten, alloyed with a

small amount of platinum. That right?"

Thorne nodded, his eyes looking straight into Graham's. "That's right. The platinum makes the cast tungsten more machinable and tougher. It cuts down on the brittleness, besides, without changing the hardness much."

"Mmmhmm." Graham was still looking at the report. At last, he looked up. "According to Dr. Dahlquist, such an alloy might be a bit difficult—not to say expensive—to produce. What do you think?"

Thorne rubbed his lips with a forefinger and looked apprehensive. "Well—well—uh—maybe it is rather expensive. I hadn't thought of that. Platinum runs into money, I know. It sure cost me plenty to make that one liner."

Graham's voice didn't change. "That's not what we mean," he said smoothly. "The materials are, in comparison to labor and equipment cost, relatively inexpensive. We'd have to know what sort of machinery is required, what it will take to retool and set up for these liners—that sort of thing." He took a deep breath and then paused. "And, of course, we'll have to know what the Space Service thinks of the liner. After all, we don't have the facilities

here at General Alloys to subject this thing to the final test—the actual run in a Rhodeland-Clevebush reactor.”

Thorne nodded. “I see what you mean.” He sat and thought for a long time. Then, he said: “Look. Suppose I do this: Suppose I go back to Peoria on the afternoon plane. I can bring back the equipment by tomorrow morning. Then you can tell how much it would cost you to build similar machines.”

Graham smiled, folding his plump cheeks into wrinkles. “That would be fine; that way, we can—”

“Excuse me, sir,” Thorne said, looking at his wrist-watch, “But if I’m going to catch that plane, I’d better leave now. I’ll see you in the morning.” He grabbed his hat and topcoat and bolted out of the office.

F. Danforth Graham looked blankly at the door for a second, then he grinned, and looked at his office intercom.

“Would you mind coming in here, Dr. Dahlquist?”

After a moment, the door opened again, and an impossibly tall, lean man walked in. He stood at least six-three, and looked as though he didn’t weigh more than one-fifty

with his pockets full of osmium. A strand of blond hair hung limply over his forehead, and his lean, pointed jaw looked as though it hadn’t been shaved that morning. But the sparkling blue eyes behind smart gold-rimmed *pince-nez* were alert and smiling in spite of the unsmiling mouth.

Graham waved him to a chair and said: “Well, how do you size it up?”

Dahlquist pulled a cigarette out of his pocket with bony fingers and lit it. “Screwy,” he said.

“How so?” Graham wanted to know.

“Doesn’t make sense. First place, I’d’ve said that alloy was impossible. Can’t cast tungsten. Melting point’s too high.

“Tungsten has a melting point of around thirty-three eighty Centigrade, higher than damn near anything else. There’s nothing you can cast it in. What do you use for a mold?”

Graham scratched his broad, pink scalp. “What does the platinum have to do with it?”

“Can’t tell you. Platinum melts at seventeen fifty-five. Shouldn’t alloy with tungsten, anyhow. At tungsten’s fusion temperature, platinum is va-

porizing like hell. It'd be like putting mercury into molten iron." Dahlquist rolled his cigarette between his fingers. "They've both got a cubic crystalline structure, of course. Tungsten's got body-centered cubic crystals, while platinum is face-centered. That wouldn't necessarily make 'em incompatible at room temperature, but I don't see how in hell you'd alloy 'em in the first place."

"How about electrolytically?" Graham asked.

"Nope," the Norseman shook his head. "Crystalline formation—grain structure—indicates cast tungsten. As I said, I'd have claimed it was impossible."

Graham knocked the dottle out of his pipe, tapping it gently against the rubber-padded edge of a huge silver ash tray.

"What would happen," he asked, "if you melted tungsten and platinum together in a pot of some kind?"

Dahlquist grinned one-sidedly. "First place, you couldn't get a pot to melt 'em in. Aside from that, the platinum would be fuming and boiling like hell by the time the tungsten started to melt. You'd have a spongy mess."

"And this stuff isn't spongy?"

Dahlquist ground out a half-smoked cigarette. "Nope. It's cast tungsten. With platinum. And a couple other things."

Graham's face took on a decisive grin. "Fine! Doctor, it doesn't matter how it's done; we know he *can* do it. And our competitors will go nuts trying to figure out *how* it's done!" He rubbed vigorously behind his ears with both palms. "We'll have the market cornered on tube linings!"

Dahlquist didn't say anything for a moment; then: "I don't know about that, Mr. Graham; remember what this Thorne said when he left?"

Graham scowled. "Certainly! He said he was going back to Peoria to get his equipment. What's wrong with that?"

The Norseman's bony shoulders went up in a shrug. "I think this country boy's taken *you* for a ride, Mr. Graham. You don't think you could get the equipment to cast tungsten on a plane, do you? Why, the stuff would weigh tons! I don't know what his game is, but I'll bet you don't see him tomorrow—or for a long time."

It was a good thing that Dr. Dahlquist hadn't offered to bet seriously. If he'd offer-

ed to eat his shirt, he might have put himself in the unpleasant position of having to do so. A good chemist *can* fix up a shirt so that it's edible, but it isn't palatable.

Peter Thorne, his deep-set eyes looking haggard but expectant, arrived at ten the next morning. He spent not more than three minutes cooling his heels in Graham's outer office before the efficient-looking young lady in the outer office informed him that "Mr. Graham will see you now."

She looked admiringly at the tall, muscular body and the hard, blocky face as Peter Thorne strode into the inner office.

F. Danforth Graham's sleek, chubby body was bent over his desk, examining a piece of paper, but as Thorne entered, he stood up, smiling. Thorne could see that there was something behind the smile, but he said nothing.

"How was the trip, Thorne?" Graham asked, whole-heartedly. "Did you bring your equipment?"

Thorne sat down. "Yes, sir. Two big packing cases. I had them sent air express; they'll be here in an hour. I sent them collect, of course. I didn't have the money to pay the charges."

Only the faintest flicker of a great, white eyebrow indicated any response on Graham's part. "Of course, Mr. Thorne," he said smoothly. "And you'll be ready for a demonstration this afternoon?"

"Not immediately, sir," Thorne said. "It'll take some time to set up the equipment. I'd like to talk to Dr. Dahlquist again. If I could get him to help me . . ."

"Certainly, Mr. Thorne," Graham agreed. "However we'd like to know something else. Those test pieces you gave us were cylinders. Now the Space Service insists that test liners sent to them for tryout must conform to a certain geometric shape. I have the specifications here.

"Would it be possible to convert your machine to these specifications within, say, six weeks?"

Thorne grinned. "I'll make them this evening, for the demonstration, sir. The apparatus is easily adjustable."

"Fine," said Graham.

In the other office, Dahlquist's thin, bony face smiled and frowned at the same time. "Who's he tryin' to kid? Or is he?" he asked softly, staring at the intercom speaker. "This is ridiculous!"

"That cable goes there—that is the four-forty line, isn't it?—that's it, there. Now, if one of you men will help me . . ."

Peter Thorne was putting the finishing touches on his machine. It was big, to be sure, but it didn't weigh the tons that Dahlquist had prophesied.

Several yards away, Graham and Dahlquist were talking in low tones. Five or six other executives were lounging around here and there, watching idly, waiting for the fireworks to start.

Graham said: "What do you mean, it won't work?"

Dahlquist shrugged. "Just what I said. Not enough power going into that thing to melt tungsten. Not in big lots like that. Hell, there's not enough to melt the platinum. It's a farce."

"Have you checked over his machine thoroughly?" Graham asked.

"Don't need to. Wouldn't let me anyway. The thing simply can't do anything like he claims for it. You wouldn't have to know how a paper punch worked to know it couldn't turn out a driveshaft forging. Same thing here."

"We'll see," said Graham.

"Okay, throw her now!" Thorne's voice called from

across the room. There was the slap of a heavy-duty relay, and then a slight click as Thorne flipped a switch on his control console. Then he turned to the men assembled around him and smiled rather sheepishly.

"I feel sort of silly, standing here, telling you men how this thing does its job, but that's what I'm supposed to do. As you can see, there's two hoppers suspended over the machine. The big one is full of powdered tungsten, and the little one contains granular platinum. They're carefully measured out through the bottom of the hoppers by an automatic weighing device which is set for the size of the thing we're going to make. Mr. Graham gave me the specifications for the Space Service test pieces, so we're going to make six of them for test purposes. Now, the . . ."

"I've got it!" whispered Dahlquist. His voice, though low, was excited.

"Got what?" whispered Graham.

"His angle. Kept wondering what he was to gain by this. Now I know. It's the platinum! He figures on getting away with some of that platinum! It'll go into that machine, and that's the last we'll see of it."

"He won't get away with a trick like that," Graham said tightly. "Let's see what he's up to."

". . . and the finished casting will roll down that chute into the tub," Thorne finished. He looked around. "Now, if you're ready, gentlemen."

He turned to the control console and began adjusting dials and rheostat settings. Then, seemingly satisfied, he punched a button. A deep hum, with powerful subsonic undertones, vibrated through the building. Snickerings and clankings sounded within the machine.

Then, suddenly, a dazzling, yellow-white cylinder appeared from a hatch at one end of the machine, slid down a chute, and landed in a steel tub at the bottom. As they appeared he counted.

"One," said Thorne mildly.

"Two," he said, a short time later.

"Three—four—five—six!"

He shut off the machine and smiled. "There you are, gentlemen. Machine them down and send them to the Government. Naturally, I don't know if they'll hold up, but we can hope, can't we?" Then he grinned. "And by the way, save the machining scraps; that stuff is expensive as hell."

Two more weeks passed, with the slow plodding of minutes and hours and days. Then, a board meeting of General Alloys of America, Incorporated, was called. At the head of the long table sat F. Danforth Graham. Before him were several sheaves of paper, divided neatly into piles. One sheaf was in his hand. His droning voice filled the room with dull reverberations as he read the report on the findings of several investigators who had worked on the Thorne Rocket Liner Machine. He came to the final sentence, finished it, and looked up.

"Now," he said, "are there any questions?"

Miss Jerri Satin (37% of the shares, by proxy and otherwise) crushed out a cigarette and said: "The Space Service has accepted the tube liners for an actual rocket test. Is that right?"

Graham nodded. "That's right. Although the liners won't hold up under the direct blast *without* refrigeration, they do fine *with* it."

"And this young man's machine makes these liners?" Miss Satin's voice sounded like her name. Thirty years had passed since her voice had been heard on the radios

of a nation, but the voice was still there, and a lovely dignity had replaced the passion-stirring beauty in her face.

"Apparently, it does," Graham acknowledged.

"Either it does or it doesn't, Mr. Graham," said Miss Satin, her voice chilly. "If it does, give him a contract; if it doesn't, throw him out."

Lewis Tenwick (12½%) stood up slowly. His nine decades of life weighed on him heavily, but they had not crushed him yet.

"Mr. Graham," he said, in a dry, old voice, "as I understand it, our only objection to giving this Mr. Thorne a contract is the statement by Dr. Dahlquist that there is no physical basis for the machine's operation. Am I correct?"

"Quite correct, Mr. Tenwick."

"Hmmm. Mr. Graham, I'm a good deal older than you—than any of you. I was a young man when this century began. We thought we knew what science was then. We were satisfied that there was nothing left to discover.

"The scientist then could have told you that a great many things were impossible: the airplane, the atomic bomb, travel to the moon, a space

station—these were all impossible.

"Frankly, Mr. Graham, I am of the opinion that a scientist *may* be able to tell us what we *can* do, but he's not worth a *damn* when it comes to telling us what we *can't* do." Slowly, and with laborious dignity, he sat down. There were several smiles around the table.

The three-hundred pound bulk of Jeremy Psmith (14%) didn't even attempt to rise. "Let's put it this way, Graham," he said, in a deep, hoarse, rumbling baritone, "if we can make money by making these things, it doesn't matter if they're made by black magic."

"I have often thought," Miss Jerri Satin cut in, "that Mr. Psmith would sell his soul to the Devil if it would net a profit." She smiled then, and it was the same brilliant smile that millions had loved three decades before. "Frankly, I must admit that *I'd* sell Mr. Psmith's soul to the Devil, too, if it would net a profit."

A chuckle ran around the table, but it was almost drowned out by the booming *Haw! Haw! Haw!* of Jeremy Psmith.

"However," Miss Satin continued, as soon as the laughter had died down, "we'd

ought to cover our own tracks, too. I suggest that the contract stipulate that General Alloys owns, lock, stock, and transistor, the patent to Mr. Thorne's machine. In addition, there should be a clause which stipulates that Mr. Thorne shall be paid on a—uh—piecework basis. In other words, he only gets his money for every successful liner turned out."

Old Tenwick raised a withered hand. "I'm not sure that would stand up in court, Miss Satin. I suggest that we . . ."

The debate went on for nearly two hours, but, at long last, they arrived at a solid decision—depending, of course, on the decision of the lawyers.

There wasn't a one of them that expected Peter Thorne to accept the contract as it stood; they thought the poor yokel had more sense than that, and were ready to bargain.

But Thorne's sole words were: "That sounds fair enough to me." At which point, he'd taken his pen out and signed the contract.

The patent went through without argument, an unusual circumstance in itself. But not even the shrewd lads in the Patent Office could deny that

a method of casting tungsten was a "new and useful discovery." The thing was iron-bound, and it belonged entirely to General Alloys, Incorporated.

The full, entire, and complete diagram, process, and description of Peter Thorne's machine was on file with the United States Government. Complex as it was, Thorne insisted, despite his attorney's protestations, that everything be recorded in detail. By the time the harassed lawyer was through, anyone in the world could, for ten cents, get a diagram of Thorne's machine.

The board of directors of General Alloys worried for a while, until they discovered one vital fact. No one but Peter Thorne could make the machine work.

Exactly what happened in foreign countries which attempted to reproduce the Thorne machine is unknown, but it is highly probable that the events paralleled, roughly, the reports sent in by Dr. Gustav Dahlquist of General Alloys.

F. Danforth Graham looked at Dr. Dahlquist through an effluvium of blue pipe-smoke. "So? What happened?"

The Norseman's figure was even leaner than before; he

looked as though he had lost an additional twenty pounds, if that were possible. But a cold, unholy light burned in his blue eyes.

He raised a bandaged hand. "Mr. Graham, I've gone over that machine inch by inch, circuit by circuit, tube by tube. It doesn't work; it *can't* work. I've rebuilt it. I've constructed an exact duplicate. And—" He waved the hand. "—this is what I've gotten."

"What happened?" repeated Graham, puffing steadily at his pipe.

"We've taken meter readings of the machine during production," Dahlquist went on. "We have slow motion pictures of exactly what Thorne does. We have duplicated that, too."

"Yesterday evening, we tried our first test run. The damned machine blew up in our faces, practically. There was red-hot metal all over the place. *Red-hot!* Around a thousand, at most. Not anywhere near enough to melt tungsten or platinum."

Graham was in no mood to sympathize. "Dr. Dahlquist," he said preemptorily, "the United States Government has given us a multi-million dollar contract to supply them with rocket tube liners. The Space Service has sent the

first successful robot ship to Venus, landed it, and brought it back. They want a manned ship to go next.

"Within a few years, we'll have to turn those liners out by the hundreds. We'll have to make better ones. And you stand there and tell me it can't be done!" He punched a button on the intercom. "Ask Mr. Thorne if he'll step in here for a moment."

He looked back up at Dahlquist. "We've tried long enough to duplicate Thorne's work without his advice. I want you to talk to him. Let's see if we can't get something out of this. If he's discovered a new principle—"

"New principle!" Dahlquist interrupted. "Couldn't have! That hick doesn't know the first thing about electronics! His machine isn't even built right! He—"

The door opened, and Peter Thorne came in. "Yes, sir?" he said.

"Sit down, Thorne," Graham said. "We need your advice." Graham's pipe had gone out, so he relit it. "According to your contract, we own the right to build your machine and use it. But we can't make it work. Why?"

"I've told you—or rather I've told Dr. Dahlquist—that I don't know, sir," said

Thorne honestly. But there was an odd sparkle in his deep-socketed eyes.

"Haven't you any ideas?" Graham asked.

Peter Thorne leaned back in his chair. "Why, yes, sir, I do. I've told them to Dr. Dahlquist, and he refuses to pay any attention."

Graham speared Dahlquist with a suspicious look as Thorne went blithely on.

"For fifteen years or so," he continued, "it's been known that the human mind had definite control over electromagnetic and gravitic fields. Matter and energy are, under the proper conditions, under the control of the human mind."

"But it's rather like trying to make an automobile go uphill. You can't push it uphill with sheer brute strength, but you can cooperate with it; you can *guide* it uphill. It's a sort of cooperative thing; you need a machine—a psionic machine—to do the work, and a human mind to guide it."

"These liners are made just that way. With the aid of the machine, I sort of—well, I *think* the alloy into place."

"The human body is a perfect example of a psionic machine. You don't have to go through a lot of tough riga-

marole to make your fingers move; you just move them." He wriggled his fingers to demonstrate. Then he spread his hands.

"It seems simple to me. If the human mind can control as complex a machine as the human body, why can't it control a simple thing like that machine of mine?"

"The only reason Dr. Dahlquist won't believe my machine works is that it doesn't fit in with the theories he's already got set in his mind. Even proof won't sway him."

Graham nodded. "Sounds perfectly reasonable to me. I didn't know we'd got that far along with such things." He turned to Dahlquist, and started to say something. But the tall, thin man was ahead of him.

"This is ridiculous," he said, thickly. "There's something wrong with that machine, and I can prove it! It doesn't—I mean, it can't—"

"Dahlquist!" Graham's voice cut across the scientist's own. "Do you or don't you intend to work with Mr. Thorne on this?"

Dahlquist's eyes blazed. "No! You sound like Bridges! Young blockhead from MIT who said that the law of conservation of matter-energy and the second law of thermo-

dynamics weren't necessarily compatible. He—"

"He got fired," said Thorne, his voice cold. "You fired him because he agreed that there might be reason behind a psionic machine."

"Damn it!" Dahlquist shouted. "You can't just throw over physics like it was a silly fairy tale. The observed facts are there!"

"Nobody is trying to say that observed facts are wrong," Thorne said quietly. He suddenly seemed stronger, bigger, and more commanding than even Graham. "It's just that they aren't the final and all-inclusive facts. There are others."

F. Danforth Graham knew nothing of the basic theories of the argument taking place before him. But he did know

that one man was right and another wrong. He stood up, pointed a finger at Dahlquist, and said: "Dr. Dahlquist, you're fired." His voice was heavy and final. "You will be permitted to resign, and your record will be clean. But I won't have a man working with me who can't see his nose in front of his face."

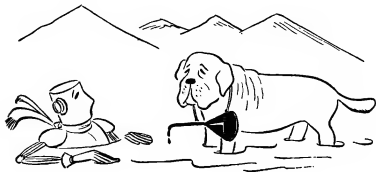
He looked at Thorne. "Do you have anything to say?"

Thorne couldn't look at Dahlquist. "I—I'd say you ought to look up young Bridges. He seemed to be interested in learning something new."

Graham nodded. "Right. That's what business needs in these times—new blood."

Thorne said nothing. He wanted to smile, but he couldn't.

THE END



DEATH OF A DINOSAUR

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

GRIMES' cigar dropped from his half-open lips. He caught it before it fell and in an explosive gesture fired it against the wall. It left a powdery smudge and pieces fluttered down on the expensive carpeting of his executive offices.

"Frozen dinosaur steaks!" he roared. "Dinosaur steaks, indeed. What kind of jackass do you take me for? Everyone knows that dinosaurs have been extinct for millions of years. This corporation allocates four million dollars a year for research. Aren't any of our chemists competent to tell us what kind of meat it is?"

The small, graying man began to perspire. He quaked before the angry, steaming mass of flesh that in calmer

The frozen food industry has worked miracles in putting rare delicacies on your dinner table. But you ain't seen nothin' yet. How would you like to sit down to a real treat? A succulent boiled breast of dinosaur? Or a nice fried leg of pterodactyl?

moments was known as Jackson Grimes, chairman-of-the-board, Spaceways Frozen Food Company, Inc.

"But I've told you, sir. We have tested the product. It is no known variety of flesh."

"What about synthetic meats?" Grimes snapped. It's probably some clever blend of cheap meats and vegetable proteins."

The little man mopped his brow.

"The report states, sir, that the cell-structure of the meat is reptilian." He tentatively held out the papers in his hand. "The species of reptile cannot be ascertained. We've checked with some of the biggest laboratories. No one can classify it."

Grimes began to pace the room. His tone altered. "You

like your job here, don't you, Ludlow?"

"Now, look here, JG . . ."

"Oh, I wasn't threatening you. No indeed. But there's one thing you'd better wake up to—and fast. In only nine months, this so-called dinosaur steak, has become the fourth biggest selling pre-cooked specialty in the frozen food industry. Its processor, Randolph Garrett, will unquestionably receive the *Fast Frozen Foods Magazine* award as "The Frozen Food Processessor of the Year." The next step will be his election as president of the World Association of Frozen Food Packers. If that happens, the publicity will force the government to consider permitting him the use of Inter-World Matter Transmitters. Should that occur," and Grimes wagged a big finger at the little man, "Spaceways will be on the way out and you with it!"

Grimes didn't wait for a reply. He strode to a spot only a few inches on the wall from the smudge his cigar butt had made. He pushed a button. A flexible metal curtain drew back, revealing the entire side of the room as one long panoramic window.

He clasped his hands behind his back and fixed his

eyes upon a gigantic two-hundred foot cone, towering above a maze of factory buildings. The cone was topped by an irridescent ball made up of innumerable facets like the design of an insect's eye.

The globe was imperceptibly turning, and occasionally, as it turned, glints of light flashed like the lines of a prismatic rainbow from one of its facets.

The big man wheeled about and directed the attention of the little man to the spectacle with a gesture of his hand.

"Remember what we were before that, Ludlow?" the big man barely whispered.

The little man nodded.

"Don't think it's just dinosaur meat I'm worried about," Grimes continued. "It's what goes with it. A leader like that product will carry a complete line of frozen foods into the stores behind it . . ." Grimes paused for effect. "If that happens," and his face was stark. "It's only a matter of time before he gets the transmitter contract."

The little man shuddered.

Frozen foods now played a role of commanding importance in space flight. When the first experimental communities were set up on the

moon in 1985, the great problem was one of supply. The time was centuries off when synthetic processes would be developed sufficiently to make the moon self-contained from the standpoint of food. Therefore, the limiting factor which held back the growth of population in the lunar cities, built by capping over craters, was the logistics and expense of transporting food. Matter transmitters had changed all that.

Sound and pictures had long been transmitted through air and space. Decades before the first successful space flight, a radar signal had been bounced off the moon. The next step was to transmit matter as one would sound or radio waves.

Amid the furore caused by the announcement that the first atomic bomb had fallen on Hiroshima in 1945, the science of matter transmission had been born.

Few people had noted a little item carried on the first page of the *New York Times*, a few months later, the same year. The item told of California experimenters who had subjected a block of carbon to intense charges of energy and radiation—succeeding in adding an infinitesimal amount of matter to the mass.

It had long been contended that matter and energy were different manifestations of the same thing. Man had always been able to convert matter into energy. Burning coal or exploding atoms does precisely that. The California experimenters proved that energy could be translated into matter.

Furious research was conducted along the lines of matter-transmission research.

Only partially perfected, the first transmitter had been rushed into action. It was quickly found that the denser materials, such as metals, could not be successfully transmitted. Uncanned food, however, lent itself admirably to transmission. It appeared that the problem of food supply to the moon was solved, until it was realized that the limited equipment for the manufacture of oxygen on the moon made it impractical to cook foods there. The answer was pre-cooked frozen foods packed in paper cartons which could be stored until used.

"They laughed at me when I ran to the head of the government office in charge of matter-transmission research," Grimes recalled. "I was the joke of the frozen



The beast reared its terrible head.

foods industry. But I convinced them that our company had been the leader in pre-cooked foods for a quarter-of-a-century. I showed them the advantages of pre-cooked frozen foods; the fact that they retained all their flavor and vitamin content; that they could be packed in transmissible paper cartons. I offered test supplies free of charge. We got the jump on the rest of the industry and the contract to supply the entire group of lunar colonies with frozen foods."

Grimes savagely stabbed the button closing the metal curtain. "There are only two Inter-World Transmitters in existence. One at Lake Erie, transmitting water to the moon. The other here. I mean to see that this one stays here!"

The telephone rang.

Ludlow scrambled for the phone.

"It's Gilliam—returning your call," he said, holding his hand over the receiver. "Ned Gilliam, publisher of the trade journal, *Fast Frozen Foods*."

"Snap on the vision screen," Grimes ordered.

The little man pressed a button. The visage of an intent, handsome, dark-haired, mustached man in his middle

forties swam onto a wall screen.

"Hello, Ned," Grimes boomed with professional, business-like warmth. "Get my contract for twelve double-spread ads in full-color? Good! Fine magazine you have there. Fine magazine."

"Best in the industry," a voice confirmed across the wire.

"Say, Ned," Grimes' voice took on a confidential tone. "Wonder if you could supply me with a little information, understand you're a walking encyclopedia when it comes to frozen foods. Speaking of information, remember when I gave you boys the beat on our company and Inter-World Transmitters? Perhaps you can return the favor now."

The lips of the projection on the wall moved. The receiver said, "Be glad to, if I can."

"Well, I'll tell you what it's all about. These frozen dinosaur steaks—great novelty—been thinking of packing it ourselves, but we can't figure out what it's made of . . ."

"Food and Drug inspector waiting outside," Ludlow interrupted.

Grimes winked Ludlow into silence and continued, "I read your magazine pretty care-

fully, Ned. Can't ever remember you running a plant story on the processing and step-by-step quality control of Garrett's product."

There was a pause while he listened. "Yes, yes, I know you've run big merchandising stories on how frozen dinosaur steaks are sweeping the nation, but for God's sake, man, what *are* frozen dinosaur steaks?"

The lips on the wall-screen stopped moving. A hand came into view and one finger delicately scratched the head.

"Look, Ned, I've got someone waiting now. If you want to be of real service, see if you can find out what Garrett puts inside those packages." He hung up.

"Tell the food and drug man to come in."

A spare, sad-looking man, bent almost double to admit his big height, came through the door.

"Cigar?" Grimes offered.

The visitor looked unhappy.

"Suit yourself," Grimes said. He lit the cigar, joggled it comfortably into one corner of his mouth, then reached over for a pile of paper and cartons set on one corner of the desk. He waved the conglomeration at the food and drug man. "Hate to do this sort of thing," he began. "See-

ing as how the man is a fellow member of the World Association of Frozen Food Packers, but the public interest comes first and my own feelings second."

The food and drug man squirmed uncomfortably.

Grimes waved a carton in the man's face. "See this," he said. "Frozen dinosaur meat. Don't have to tell you there are no dinosaurs. Man's misrepresenting his product. Open and closed case for you boys. Have all the information you need. I've contacted the city health inspector and the Better Business Bureau. Between you, it should be possible to close this man down before he poisons someone."

Deep lines etched themselves in the food and drug man's face. His Adam's apple bobbed convulsively. "Don't need your information," he said finally. "Know all about it."

"Then why don't you do something?" Grimes fairly screamed.

"Can't," the food and drug man replied in funeral tones. "Man isn't breaking any laws. Matter of fact, there ain't any laws covering dinosaur meat."

"Surely," Grimes said, his words dripping with sarcasm, "you men know there is no such thing as dinosaur meat?"

"Mebbe not," was the reply, "but this ain't no meat we ever saw before. Man's willing to comply with any regulations. He put in a full-time meat inspector. Place is so clean you could eat off the floor."

"But the meat's a synthetic. A fabricated product. Your laws cover that."

The man shook his head. "Our meat inspector sees them take it out of the freezer in big bloody chunks. It's no synthetic."

The telephone rang.

Mechanically Grimes picked it up.

"No!" he said. "Not really. . . . Dinosaur hamburgers with tomato sauce . . . Got into Chicago vending machines . . . Going over big . . . thanks . . . good boy . . . on the job." He hung up.

He waved the food and drug man out of the room.

Ludlow started to follow him out.

"Not you," Grimes said. "Stay here."

"Now it's vending machines," he muttered. "Vending machines sell 22% of all the frozen foods in the country. Thought they wouldn't go over in '63. Ended up with stores installing whole banks of them, with seats and tables

for people to eat foods that were stored frozen and served hot. Put almost every airport, railroad and bus terminal food stand out of business."

"We almost went out of business ourselves when Atomic Frozen Foods pushed us out of them for a couple of years," Ludlow reminded.

"But the publicity from the Matter Transmitters got us back in," Grimes interrupted. "It was the promotion that did it. Remember? SPACEWAY'S FROZEN FOODS ARE BEAMED TO THE MOON. SHE'S MOON-STRUCK — SHE USES SPACEWAY'S FROZEN FOODS. ON TERRA OR ON LUNA—IT'S SPACEWAYS FROZEN TUNA."

"That last one was a pip," Ludlow said happily. "I remember, it was Mike Taylor, the engineer who designed the transmitter tower who thought it up."

"That's right," Grimes recalled. "He was potted, as usual. Good man. Brilliant. But I had to let him go. Couldn't stay away from the bottle. Wonder what ever became of him?"

"My God!" Grimes catapulted from his seat. "Why didn't we think of it?"

"Think of what?"

"Taylor designed the freezer-storage plant for Garrett just before Garrett put frozen

dinosaur steaks on the market."

"So?"

"Get him. A couple of drinks and he may talk. Better yet let the detective agency get him. They've given us precious little information on the Garrett operation for the amount of money we've paid them."

Despite his diminutive size, Ludlow was a man of action. In seconds he had the agency on the phone. Before he could give more than his name the voice at the other end of the wire said, "Coincidence you called, Mr. Ludlow. We just received some information that may interest you."

"Please—let's have it."

"Garrett's Frozen Foods has just purchased two surplus half-tracks with 75-millimeter guns in storage since World War II. They also purchased a supply of non-explosive shells to go with it. We understand they signed a release swearing to use them for business purposes only."

"But, but," spluttered Ludlow, "this doesn't make any more sense than the last report you gave me seven months ago telling me about a purchase of four large-size bazookas with a supply of rocket shells left over from the Korean war. Then, they

signed an affidavit saying that they were going to use them for hunting big game."

"That's so," the detective agency man replied. "That was the time they hired four African big-game hunters on a full-time basis."

"Great help that information was," Ludlow retorted. "Your own agency confirms that the hunters enter the Garrett plant at 9 a.m. and leave at 4 p.m., except during the past six weeks when they have been working six days a week and overtime every day. Besides, the only game big enough to need a 75-millimeter gun would be a . . . would be a . . ."

"A dinosaur," Grimes concluded glumly.

"We have guests," Mr. Randolph Garrett observed to John Fletcher, big-game hunter and life-long friend.

"The latest model helicopter," Fletcher commented, his booming voice complimenting his powerful frame. There was not a black hair on his head, but he was still an imposing figure. "Beautiful job. Bet she can do a thousand without straining."

Garrett moved across to the window and squinted through his ancient pair of wire-frame spectacles.

"Say, John, my eyes aren't as good as they should be. Am I going blind or is that Jackson Grimes?"

"It is, it sure is!" roared Fletcher.

Grimes waddled in, followed furtively by Ludlow. He stuck out a big, sweaty palm. Garrett accepted it with apparent misgivings.

"Nice little place you've got here," Grimes said with a show of affability. "You built a neat plant, I must say. Always felt you were a good operator. Like to have a little talk with you. Is it O.K. to speak in front of this gentleman here?"

Garrett nodded assent.

"I won't mince any words, Garrett. I've been looking for a good specialty number for my frozen food line. I think you have it. The trouble is you're growing too fast for your britches. You haven't got the capital to keep pace with your expansion. On top of that you've only one big seller—dinosaur steaks. If that goes sour, you're in trouble. Why don't you team up with me? Plenty of capital. Additional lunar distribution through Inter-World Transmitters. What do you say?"

Garrett blinked nearsightedly through the thick lenses of his glasses. He swallowed

a couple of times. Then he spoke. "Funny talk from the man who always called me a clown. You had some very humorous things to say when my frozen prune juice flopped. I might add that your remarks about my frozen seafood vegetarian steak made from seaweed were anything but complimentary."

"Come, come," Grimes purred. "Let bygones be bygones. I was wrong—at least about frozen dinosaur steaks. I'm offering to buy you outright or exchange stock, whichever you prefer."

He reached into his pocket and slapped several documents on the desk. "There you are. Papers for either a purchase or exchange of stock. Price is good, too. You're not a youngster anymore; you can retire or we'll give you an executive position in Spaceway's Frozen Foods."

Garrett fumbled with the papers. "This is all kind of sudden. You don't have to have a decision right this minute?"

"No rush, but a quick decision is the best one, I always say. Built my fortune on it."

"Since you gentlemen have come so far," Garrett said, "perhaps you'd like to see my set-up?"

Grimes' eyes shifted to Ludlow's for a moment. Ludlow breathed deeply. "Delighted," Grimes replied enthusiastically.

Garrett and Fletcher led the way. The plant was in full operation. Twenty assembly lines, completely automatic, except for one attendant at the master controls, smoothly fed raw blocks of whitish meat into electronic ovens where they were thoroughly cooked in minutes. Right through to packaging and cartoning they were untouched by human hands. The cartons were conveyed by moving belts into a storeroom where they were automatically stacked.

"Very nice," Grimes breathed. "Very nice, but where does your meat supply come from?"

Garrett and Fletcher exchanged significant glances.

"If we're going to merge, what's the harm of showing me?" Grimes demanded.

"I'm afraid even if we showed you, you'd scarcely believe us," Garrett offered by way of explanation.

Abruptly there was a shower of sparks and one of the lines ground to a halt.

"Darn that Taylor and his crazy wiring," Garrett cursed. "You gentlemen will have to

excuse me a minute. I have to get this line running again."

Grimes and Ludlow were suddenly alone. The other nineteen lines continued to rumble along. Suddenly there was a loud grinding noise in the background. A half-track truck with a 75-millimeter gun mounted on it swung past the end of the assembly line and down a corridor.

"Come on," Grimes grabbed Ludlow by the arm and, grunting and wheezing, puffed after the half-track.

About sixty yards down the corridor it stopped in front of a freezer warehouse door.

Instinctively, Grimes and Ludlow lifted the collars of their coats in anticipation of the blast of cold air.

The door rose slowly into the ceiling in three separate sections, each with air-space between it for insulation. A blast of tropical air emerged, and with it the fetid odor of decaying vegetation and a chaotic blend of noises. Keening above it was the whine of a meat-cutting saw.

The half-track disappeared into the storage room. The two men hesitated a moment. Then, as the first of the three doors began sliding closed, Grimes grabbed Ludlow by the arm and yanked him into the room.

The heat was almost as bad as a Turkish bath. A brilliant light from the far end of the room temporarily blinded both men.

The doors clicked shut behind them.

The first thing they saw was a huge, unidentifiable carcass sliding slowly down a trough. A tremendous band saw was segmenting it and shunting the pieces down a chute which apparently emptied into the processing room.

What appeared to be the back-end of a crane, powered by a tiny atomic engine, faced them. But the lifting clamps of the crane extended into the brilliant glare at the end of the room.

Slowly their eyes became accustomed to the light. Grimes' eyes bulged. His mouth gaped.

Ludlow screamed and buried his head in Grimes' coat.

Before them moved a land of veritable nightmare. The door, the side walls of the room and even the crane and carcass all made sense. But the far end of the room was literally another world.

It was like seeing a picture through a television screen whose edges were growing dark and ragged.

As far as the eye could see

stretched acres of tangled foliage and swampy land. And through the spongy, green mass slithered as bizarre and unidentifiable a mass of fighting, kicking, screaming, dying life as had ever emerged from an opium smoker's dream. Most of the creatures appeared reptilian, including the occasional bat-winged monster that dive-bombed down and rose aloft carrying a screeching nightmare in its jagged beak.

Then, through the thickest part of the foliage, lumbered a brownish-green mass of stinking flesh the size of three elephants. Its neck, fully thirty yards long, swung from side to side, while a ridiculously tiny head surveyed the clearing.

Abruptly there was an ear-splitting clap of thunder. The tiny head disappeared from the body and blood oozed down the neck. But the neck continued to move from side to side as though it did not realize that it had lost an integral part of its anatomy.

The half-track emerged from the dense vegetation, the muzzle of its 75mm still smoking. A man swung back the breach of the gun, ejected the shell, rammed another one in. A second man was manually sighting the gun and manipu-

lating the mechanism to bring it back on its target. The driver sat tensed, ready to gas off if the creature attacked.

There was a shout from the man sighting the gun. The loader pulled the lanyard and dropped into a metal pit. The weapon blasted and recoiled viciously over the head of the crouching man. The shot struck the monster near the base of the tail. There was no explosion, the shell was obviously solid. So slow was the nervous system of the giant that for a moment nothing happened. Then its legs slowly wobbled and it pitched forward.

Grimes remembered something he had once read about prehistoric dinosaurs having two brains, one in the head and the other at the base of the tail.

Suddenly the crane was in operation. It swooped down and fastened on the still squirming creature. Then, creaking and straining, it lifted the bleeding hulk, swiveled about and dropped it heavily upon the great trough. Slowly the mass slid down the trough toward the band saw which had just completed cutting the last carcass into blocks.

"What's it all about?" Ludlow questioned above the din

and through chattering teeth.

There was no reply from Grimes, except a nervous mopping of perspiration from his brow.

Suddenly a loud bell clanged. The crane slowly withdrew its forward grapples from the strange world ahead.

The driver of the half-track heard the bell. He wheeled the vehicle about and headed back into the warehouse.

Grimes and Ludlow ducked behind the crane.

One man got down from the vehicle and pushed a button opening the warehouse doors.

The half-track noisily rolled out of the room.

"I've had enough of this," Grimes rasped. "Let's get out of here."

The door had closed, but Grimes again punched the button.

Suddenly Ludlow let out a scream.

A miniature of the creature just killed—a miniature merely ten tons in weight, apparently unaffected by the bright glare that frightened off the others, was nonchalantly lumbering into the warehouse.

The filmy membrane which covers the reptilian eye and enables them to see under water had an unhealthy whitish cast, indicating that

the creature was partially blind.

He blundered against the automatic crane—it teetered, then crashed sideways, tearing a giant gap through the wall, ripping up electrical connections as it did so.

There was a loud “pop” like a flashlight bulb. Abruptly, the other world was gone. In its place was a normal wall. But there was nothing normal about the reptilian, long-necked horror that half-ambled, half-slithered toward the two men.

Before the third door had completely risen they were under it and out in the corridor. The massive creature blundered through after them, carrying the surrounding wall with him as the door proved too small to accommodate it.

Grimes tripped and fell flat. But the smaller Ludlow made the big swinging doors of the processing kitchen.

The huge bulk swept past Grimes, apparently after the racing figure of Ludlow.

The walls of the processing kitchen gave way as it followed the little man into the room.

Grimes blanched in horror as he heard Ludlow scream.

Then he watched, too paralyzed to move, as a snake-like head emerged from the debris.

Grimes closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the huge red smear on the mouth of the monster.

Something “swooshed” past his ear. There was an explosion. He opened his eyes. Fletcher, the big-game hunter was standing there with a bazooka in his hands. Fletcher fired a second and a third rocket. The great mass of flesh reeled and slowly settled to the floor.

“Ludlow,” Grimes sobbed, “Poor Ludlow.”

Fletcher smiled. “I think he’s all right,” he said reassuringly. “That particular species of dinosaur is a vegetable eater. He got that red smear around his mouth by dipping his head in the boiling vat of tomato sauce we use for our frozen pre-cooked dinosaur hamburgers with tomato sauce.”

They moved slowly around the still-twitching body of the dinosaur. Ludlow was under a vat of tomato sauce—in a dead faint.

Garrett drove up in an electric lift truck. His eyes, behind the thick glasses, were very sad. “It’s all over, John,” he said to the big-game hunter. “The crane the dinosaur knocked over destroyed the hook-up. Even Mike Taylor couldn’t put it back together

... he wouldn't know how ... he was drunk when he set it up in the first place—mixed matter-transmitter parts with atomic powered freezing equipment. Once sober he had no idea what he'd done."

Fletcher chuckled. "Can't help remembering Taylor's face when we turned on the power and he saw those dinosaurs."

The old man smiled wanly. "Yes, he committed himself to an upstate sanitarium for the cure. I called up the other day. Attendants said he even sniffs water suspiciously when they bring it in."

"Look, don't you think you owe me an explanation?" Grimes demanded as he attempted to brush the mortar dust from his expensive suit.

"No reason to keep it from you now," said the Old Man. "You probably still won't believe it."

"Won't believe it!" roared Grimes. "I'll believe *anything* now."

"It all started when I hired Mike Taylor to design and install the atomic freezing system for my new plant," Garrett began. "I originally intended to freeze cactus sauté—cactus is a very tasty dish if made right, you know."

He waited for someone to

challenge him but no one did, so he continued.

"You heard how Taylor got drunk and mixed the whole business up. I'm not quite sure what happened, but I read a book once by J. W. Dunne called "An Experiment With Time." He claimed that time wasn't merely divided into three categories—past, present and future—but only seemed that way to the observer. Actually, he felt that time was an infinite series of dimensions; that points in the past and future in the overall frame of reference co-existed simultaneously. His theory is the only plausible explanation for what happened. Somehow, Taylor's crazy hook-up opened the door to a prehistoric period co-existing side by side with our present era.

"But, man," Grimes shouted, "You could have made a fortune selling just one of those beasts to a scientific institution—even the dead carcass. Why fool around with frozen dinosaur meat?"

Garrett's face was blank for a moment, then he replied. "Funny thing," he said. "Somehow, I never thought of it. All my life," and his voice fairly pleaded for understanding, "I've wanted to make my mark in frozen foods. I've tried pretty nearly

everything. Oh, yes, there were some minor successes—but nothing big. When this came along, all I could think of was: 'How would the public take to it in frozen form.' "

He turned to the big-game hunter. "I guess Fletcher, here, never thought of anything else but what it would be like to hunt a dinosaur."

"It was my good friend Fletcher here," he said with an affectionate gesture towards the big-game hunter, "who wanted to hunt the beasts. When he killed one we sampled its flesh and found it provided a delightful taste sensation—something like a cross between breast of chicken and filet mignon. It could be sold for a fraction of the cost of either. The result was instant success."

"The time period or dimension existing nearest to our own, was the age of the dinosaur. They roamed the earth for fifty million years, you know. Just a pin-point in the overall time picture, but a reasonably sizable pin-point."

The men walked back to the plant office in silence.

"Then you can't produce the stuff any more—your source of supply is cut off?" Grimes finally asked.

Garrett nodded.

Grimes picked up the

papers he had left on the desk. "The merger's off then—no equity on your part."

"But . . ." Garrett started to protest.

"And," added Grimes, "you're still the biggest fool in the frozen food industry."

The old man and the big-game hunter watched the trim helicopter disappear over the horizon.

The big-game hunter turned to Garrett as if to offer comfort, but the old man's hand stayed him.

He turned and started toward one of the plant's storage freezers. Fletcher followed him.

"You know," the old man said as they walked. "You know, I was planning to put out a new product before they showed up and spoiled everything. Can't do it now, supply is cut off, but I'd like to ask your opinion on something."

The door to the freezer slowly opened. Along the wall, in tremendous racks built especially for the purpose, rested row upon row of greenish-brown eggs—varying from one to three feet in diameter.

"How long," the old man asked. "How long do you suppose it would take to hatch and raise a dinosaur?"

THE END

THE REVOLVING FAN



MAGNITUDE. VOL. I, #3. Spring, 1956. Horizons Enterprises, 409 West Lexington Dr., Glendale 3, Calif. 10¢; 6/50¢. 20 pp.

Ralph Stapenhorst, Jr., editor of **MAG**, and his colleagues set out to produce a professional-type fanzine. They succeeded only in format. Although I enjoyed Ed M. Clinton's "How to be a Science-Fiction Writer—Like Me," a tongue-in-cheek investigation of the s-f cliché, I can't say as much for Helen M. Urban's "Is Science Fiction Escape Literature?" Far too pedantic. The next item, a radio script entitled "Remember Us," deserves to have its bombast excused only after we remember how young its authors, Paul Arram and Tad Duke, must be. A purported bit of s-f "history," "Ye Traversal of the Skyes by Mifsle Unto the Surfafe of the Veree Moone," accredited to one William Brownson does not, however, come off, and the editor's ruminations, news of the Chesley Donovan Foundation (just what is that?) close this bit of Californiana.

* * *

TRANSURANIC. Oct. '55. Al Alexander, 2216 Croydon Rd., Charlotte, North Carolina. 5¢. 1 page.

This one-pager is reviewed to encourage the Carolina S-F Society to put out larger issues of more general appeal in subsequent publication. Three columns contain the following: a review of the prozine **INFINITY**; a book review of Roger Lee

Vernon's "The Space Frontiers"; a report that Larry Shaw, editor of INFINITY, will attend a Southeastern Convention (that must have been the one held in March) completing a slapdash, haphazard effort not worth its price.

* * *

FRONTIER. #5. Dec. '55. Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. 6/\$3. 22 pp.

At fifty cents for the copy of FRONTIER, it would be better to join the Society for the Advancement of Space Travel, of which this is the official bulletin. Members receive the publication free.

After the Chairman's Report, the issue leads off with a lucid, fascinating look at the near future, as Norman V. Petersen, guided missiles engineer for the Sperry Gyroscope Company, writes on "The Conquest of Space." This precise precis is well worth the price of the magazine by itself.

"Three Fables for Astronauts" presents, in Joseph Lincoln, an ironic and talented writer whose eye readily sees through both sciolism and stupidity. "The Space Satellite as a Weapon of War," by Kenn Curtis, attacks the idea and appeals to the powers-that-be to use the space platform for peaceful purposes. Walter R. Rose's "Conflicts of Space" briefly outlines the puzzle of extra-territorial and extra-terrestrial rights and claims, and Thomas E. Purdom's "A National Educational Program for Astronautics" is just that. I have as yet to find a poor issue of FRONTIER; this one is better than most.

* * *

ETHERLINE. Issues: Nos. 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65. Amateur Fantasy Pubns. of Australia. 6 Bramerton Rd., Caulfield, S.E. 8, Victoria, Australia. U.S. Agents: West Coast —J. Ben Stark, 290 Kenyon Ave., Berkeley, 4, Calif. East Coast: John Hitchcock, 15 Arbutus St., Baltimore 28, Md. 13 issues \$1.00.

The outstanding quality to be found in these issues of ETHERLINE is enthusiasm. After burrowing my way out of the pile which a sweating mailman had left at my door, I

came up with the wish that more American fans would feel as immersed—without being so one-sided—as devoted, without becoming apologetic—as enthusiastic, without becoming blasé—about s-f as our Australian friends. **ETHERLINE** consists, in the main, of news of fandom in the U.S. and Australia, reports from the prozines, reviews of books and 'zines, a bit of fiction, and some interesting articles. Full of zest, it's worth getting—especially at that price.

* * *

INSIDE AND SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISERS. #13. Jan. '56. Ron Smith, 611 W. 114th St., Apt. 3d-310, New York 25, N.Y. 5/\$1. 46 pp.

Editor Ron Smith has, as always (or almost always) come up with a good issue. I was struck pleasantly by a wonderful satire on what a certain Moskowitz calls "the sense of wonder"—that neurotic, antiquated phrase with which the aforesaid gent has filled sundry columns in fan-and-prozines. Randy Garrett and Lin Carter show up such flatulent bellowsings in "Masters of the Metropolis." Kenneth Ford, in "Boundries in the Brainpan," continues the subject of s-f movies where Robert Bloch had left off (in an earlier **INSIDE**) and adds to the checklist those items which he claims Bloch left out. There is also the usual excellent review section.

But the main item I want to write about is a section entitled "Manunkind," written by an unknown (to me) writer named David R. Bunch. This is a collection of six short-short stories, subtitled, "The Problem Was Lubrication"; "One Did Not Suspect the Little Doors"; "Warning #1"; "In the Time of the Disposal of Infants"; "Thanks! Anyway"; and "Animals Were So Kind."

There is a kind of horrifyingly unsane sanity about them. I suspect that Mr. Bunch did not sell his stories to more prosperous magazines because they contain either implicit or explicit references to sexual activity in human beings, robots, and machines. Then, too, there is a disturbing quality about these savage, saturnine, satirical, ironic, and bloodily non-chalant tales. They are triggers setting off an emotional chain reaction—and perhaps the closest to existentialism which s-f can provide.

I'd like to see more work by David R. Bunch—if only because he shows a fresh, albeit disturbing, talent. Methinks some day I shall.

Recap: Get this issue if you can.

* * *

ISFA, VOL. II #4. Ed McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop, Indianapolis, Ind. No price listed. 48 pp.

Lead-off story is an inconclusive little item by Bill Nelson, "The Gift," which concerns the reaction of a 15-year-old boy who is contacted by three extra-terrestrials. Then follows a Clevention report—even after all this time—by Thos. Stratton, Sr. Jack Daniels' "A Defense of Fandom" jousts with straw men, for his argument—that modern parents ban science fiction for its deleterious effects on their offspring—is invalid. Four pages of drawings—in a rather poor style—introduce Warren Link's "The Saga of Undertaker Untermeyer," which is not only badly written, but is a masterpiece of bad taste. Robert Coulson's reviews of s-f books, and Gene DeWeese's review of a movie entitled "Cat Women of the Moon" are adequate. Sundry other efforts and a letters column bring to a close this poor example of what has been, in the past, a rather enjoyable 'zine.

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BY THE READERS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Congratulations on your 30th Anniversary! After lugging home the special Anniversary issue and reading it through, I find myself regretting the fact that I wasn't around for the first issues, in the days of Hugo Gernsback. There is a certain unknown flavor to the fiction herein, as compared to the s-f today's magazines publish . . . I don't know if it can be called a sense of wonder or not, but I do know that (as you mentioned in "The Observatory") the stories were fun to read, and held my interest throughout.

Naturally, many of my personal *AMAZING* favorites were omitted, but with a magazine of thirty years tenure to choose from, I believe you did a remarkably good job of selecting a representative lineup. I particularly enjoyed "Robot AL76 Goes Astray" by Isaac Asimov, and "Wacky World" by Ed Hamilton.

All in all, this special issue is quite a nice way to celebrate *AMAZING's* birthday, and I can only hope that I'll be around for the fortieth and the fiftieth and . . . well, as long as you keep publishing, I'll keep reading. Fair enough?

Kent Moomaw
4722 Peabody Avenue
Cincinnati 27, Ohio

• *Fair enough, Kent. The Anniversary Issue was such a huge success that we may not wait thirty years before we publish another one. The backlog of classic stories is so great,*

we feel it would be a shame to keep it beyond reach of the new generation of science-fiction fans. —ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

Other than the fact that I think *AMAZING* to be improving, I don't have very much of importance to say except to give a few comments on the eternal controversy about the letters-to-the-editor section of the magazine.

Some want less, some want more. There is a way to partially satisfy everyone. You select letters of sufficient quality (when available) to print three, four or five pages. To satisfy the ego of the others who write in, have one page that gives only the names and addresses and possibly a short comment on the letter. Any letter deserves to be printed in full. This system has been used before in some of your *former* competitors and it did some good.

This serves a double purpose. Those who merely want ego-boo get partial satisfaction and those who want to collect names of others who have sufficient interest in science fiction to write in to the magazines.

Maybe this idea will not appeal to you but I'm submitting it anyhow. It is, at least, a partial solution to all.

Arthur Hayes

P.O. Box 135

Matachewan, Ont., Canada

• *It's certainly an idea worth kicking around, Mr. Hayes. Quite a few correspondents are unable to see their names in print because there wasn't room for their letters. But whether or not they would be satisfied with just their name is something else again. We want to please everyone, of course, but lack of space makes it impossible. Perhaps a list of names would be the answer. Let's have additional comment on this idea. —ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

All right! I'll admit that there is such a thing as "artistic license" and that illustrators may use it, but will you please tell me *what* connection there is between "Everybody's Watching You," by C. H. Thames, and the illustration for it. I can find no mention in the story of a clothes removing screen.

...OR SO YOU SAY

(Could there have been a mix-up between this story and "Dream Girl"?) or a live Roc. (They were much bigger than the one in the picture, according to the story—"It had wings, big, loose, flapping wings fifty feet across") on the stage of the "Million Dollar Dilemma" with the contestants. This is going too far.

By the way, let me commend you for the choice of stories in the March *AMAZING STORIES*. That issue was *Terrific!!!* Need I say more?

Is there any hope of seeing some of Arthur C. Clarke's stories in future issues of *AMAZING* or *FANTASTIC* s-f? In my opinion he is the best living author of s-f.

Richard H. Hendrickson
Bridgehampton
Long Island, N.Y.

• *As a rule, we stick right to the story line when ordering an illustration for a yarn, Mr. Hendrickson, seeing to it that a definite scene in the story serves as a base for the illustration. But once in a while the illustrator gets so enthused about an idea he sees that we haven't the heart to say nay. So we let him go ahead. Such was the case with "Everybody's Watching You." So, while the illo was somewhat symbolical, we thought the artist did a very good job and a lot of readers backed us up. And honestly—didn't you think it was a darned good illustration? —ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I had not intended to write to you on your Anniversary Issue because, before I even started reading it, I realized you would get many hundreds of letters saying how terrific it was . . . in which case, I thought, a few humble words of appreciation from me would add little to the many favorable comments.

Along about page 22, I guess, I changed my mind . . .

It ~~was~~ terrific! And a lot better than I thought it would be. I'm one of those who wasn't reading s-f even 10 years ago, and believed the people who said s-f was silly and stupid and simple in its early days.

Not so! For me at least. Sure, I found many of the thoughts expressed were wrong; and many conclusions of the stories

were awkward from today's viewpoint, but nevertheless I discovered I could *believe* those stories or *wanted* to believe them more than most of the more correct science fiction that is being written today.

I thought Robert Heinlein had the most foresight of all your prediction givers—but I guess that's only natural. I can't give the relative merits of the stories because I liked them all equally well.

Suggestion: Why don't you do this every month?!

Bill Pearson
4516 E. Glenrosa
Phoenix, Ariz.

• *And so, with this letter, we close the book on the Anniversary Issue. It was lots of fun, it sold tremendously, and certainly cut the groundwork for another such in the future. The enthusiastic reception was gratifying indeed. Thanks a million—everyone! —ED.*

Dear Editor:

In your March 1956 *AMAZING* you had a letter asking what a fanzine was. And you neglected to answer him. For shame! You didn't enlighten the poor lost soul about the best thing science fiction has yet produced.

This is the writing (Duane, Stratton, DeWeese) that made Shakespeare look like a mere dawdler, and You neglected to tell him!

The most tremendous of the tremendous is *X-EISFA*, now *YANDRO* 5¢. (No, I'm not a COULSON under a pen name.) The next, *FANTASY-TIMES*. If you want to know what a fanzine is, why not send for one.

John W. Thiel
14901 Hamlin Ave.
Midlothian, Illinois

• *This letter doesn't belong in "... Or So You Say." It's a bold, brash bid for a fanzine plug and as such should have been handed to "The Revolving Fan" editor to do with as he saw fit. But at times we admire boldness and brashness and this happens to be one of the times. So it got in, John. Congratulations. —ED.*

Dear Editors:

For a short time only I have access to a great number of your back issues, some as far back as Number 1. Knowing you have a large number of readers who undoubtedly want back issues for themselves I am taking this chance to write. As a collector myself I know how other collectors feel about the very old issues.

I know there must be a lot of collectors anxious to get their hands on these old issues. I hope that the appearance of this letter will be helping many avid collectors of science fiction.

Craig McSorley
4316 W. Thistle St.
Seattle 16, Wash.

• *No doubt you're right, Craig. This notice will probably flood you with orders. That Number One sounds good. Probably has a high premium on it by this time. We wouldn't know how valuable it is because here in the editorial offices, we're more concerned about next month's AMAZING.* —ED.

Dear Editor:

All New York City teen-age fans are invited to join a new s-f club. If you are interested call Marty Fleischman at CY 3-0739.

Martin Fleischman
1247 Grant Avenue
Bronx 56, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Browne:

This is my first fan letter, but I felt that I had to comment on the May issue. I liked all of the stories, especially the last part of "The Scarlet Saint." The illustration for "Of Men and Bugs" fooled me, I thought it was a comedy. All of them were good not a dull one in the bunch.

I agree with Don Legere except for the weird stuff I like it and I think it's s-f. Like him I must be ignorant, I don't understand Bradbury. Who says it's s-f? It's a good thing it's a free country, some people like his writing. Somebody tell me what bon chance means?

I'm sorry there weren't any Fanzines to review. I'm waiting for one which has a large personal column or is a s-f market-

ing fanzine. While I'm at it would someone print a complete list of them.

Most of the fans who write are from the east, Calif. and Ill. What's happened to all of the other fans. Life says there's two million of us, so let's hear from them. Especially from Iowa. I'd like their addresses.

Franklin Berquist
5 North 3 Avenue
Marshalltown, Iowa

• *Speaking of weird stuff—we're in the middle of a horror-movie craze. Three of them are playing on Times Square in high-priced houses. —ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

For the second time I wish to express my humble thoughts about *AMAZING STORIES* magazine. My first letter was written shortly after *A.S.* came out in its present size, and I expressed disappointment in the stories contained therein. However, since then the stories have been improving and now I believe they are at least as good or even better than the old pulp editions.

Oh, there are the odd stories which don't come up to par, but for the most part are tops. So congratulations on returning *AMAZING STORIES* to its high standards and I hope you can keep the stories a mixture of action, with a bit of science. I like some science in the stories and a real good share of action.

Keep up the good work, and more power to you. I don't go for serials, but "The Scarlet Saint" was very good.

L. A. Mattinson
Box 91
Annapolis Royal
Nova Scotia

• *There was some debate as to whether we should use serials when AMAZING went monthly. Our decision was to run them on the basis of merit. "The Scarlet Saint" obviously filled the bill on that score. We have not as yet found another as good. When we do, you'll find the story in AMAZING. —ED.*

THE OBSERVATORY

(Concluded from page 6)

Fan: How about another *Warlords of Mars*?

Ed: Can't get one. Burroughs is dead.

Fan: Well, how about some of that great old science fiction?

Ed: Hard to come by. We publish great *new* science fiction.

Fan: Well, if we have to settle for that—

Ed: What do you mean settle? Science fiction isn't a static medium. In those days we predicted the scientific marvels of today. Do you want us to sit on our laurels—?

Fan: Not sit—rest.

Ed: All right. Do you want us to rest on our laurels? So we predicted the atom bomb and a dozen or so other present-day realities. Now we've got to hump ourselves and tell the people what it's going to be a hundred years from now.

Fan: Say—maybe you've got something.

Ed: That's only part of it. *Amazing's* going to stay fast, exciting. The very best.

Fan: Swell! I'll pass the word along.

Ed: Tell them I'm not going to let Browne and Palmer and Gernsback down.

Fan: I'll do that. Good luck.

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